Ladies Not For Turning?

An Comparative Analysis of Gender Performativity and Leadership Styles of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi

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Preface

For as long as I can remember, I have been deeply fascinated by political leadership. From democracies to dictatorships, and from monarchies to republics, I find it immensely compelling how individuals can exert influence (whether at varying levels of intensity) on policymaking and the mobilization of citizens. Looking back at the history of humanity and the emergence of civilizations and cultural groupings, I am repeatedly drawn to the same question: what would the world have looked like if governmental leadership had been exercised by different people? What if Napoleon had never been born, or Cleopatra? In other words, how much has the existence of a single person, with their unique character traits and background, shaped the way the world is remembered and the way societal life is perceived and lived today? It makes me acutely aware that society is not only constructed and defined by macro-level structures, the level at which we are often inclined to frame it. That abstraction seems inevitable at times, especially when reality appears to be shaped from a distance. Yet reality is formed by real people, who are in turn influenced by the broader whole and their social context. It touches on the classic tension between structure and agency and also speaks to my academic background, having completed a Bachelor's degree in Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. In hindsight, this interest has proven to be a fertile basis for the development of this thesis.

Within the broader question of how individual political leaders influence social reality, both in the present and historically, my attention was soon drawn to the role of gender. Looking at the global history of executive leadership and the present status quo, it becomes apparent that this is a domain largely dominated by men, across nearly all religious and cultural contexts. That sex and its socially constructed counterpart, gender, play a decisive role in shaping the form and legitimacy of political leadership is something I consider to be a fact rather than a hypothesis. This naturally led me to the more specific question that would guide the development of this thesis: what exactly is the relationship between gender and political leadership, and how can it be understood?

To explore this relationship in more depth, I chose to examine the leadership styles of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi. Several reasons underlie this decision. First, despite their ideological differences and the contrasting nature of their domestic governmental systems, both leaders maintained a diplomatic relationship that was, according to historical records, marked by personal warmth and mutual respect. This dynamic raises the question of whether gender played a role in shaping not only their leadership styles but also the nature of

their bilateral rapport. Second, Thatcher and Gandhi represent two radically different national backgrounds. The United Kingdom functioned as a Western, post-imperial power, while India operated as a postcolonial, non-Western democracy emerging from British rule. This contrast provides a unique comparative framework that reflects the global North-South divide, while simultaneously offering a point of intersection through a shared colonial history. Finally, both women were the first to assume the highest political office in their respective countries. In doing so, they each confronted and redefined prevailing gender norms within the political sphere. This parallel enables an analysis of how gender performativity interacts with leadership style across cultural, historical, and institutional contexts.

In many ways, this thesis is the result of a long-standing curiosity about how individuals shape the world around them and how they in turn are shaped by it. The cases of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi offered a way to make that abstract fascination tangible by examining how two women navigated the immense weight of history, expectation, and power within male-dominated political systems. Through their stories, I have sought to better understand not only the dynamic interplay between personal leadership and broader social realities, but also how gender mediates that relationship. Writing this thesis has deepened my awareness of how lived experience, identity, and power intersect in executive life, and how gender, far from being a mere background characteristic, plays an active and performative role in shaping both the perception and the practice of leadership.

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Introduction

This master's thesis investigates how gender performativity and leadership style intersect in the political careers of Indira Gandhi (Prime Minister of India, 1966 to 1977 and 1980 to 1984) and Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, 1979 to 1990). The analysis is guided by the central research question: How does the application of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Bernard M. Bass's leadership style framework, through Critical Discourse Analysis and Comparative Case Studies of archival material from Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, uncover the influence of gender performativity on their leadership styles and their contextual differences?

In doing so, this thesis contributes to an ongoing academic debate surrounding gender and governmental authority: whether female leaders strategically mobilize gendered norms to gain legitimacy, or whether they are primarily shaped and constrained by patriarchal structures. Existing literature shows a general scholarly consensus that women in executive political roles must conform to gender norms in order to be perceived as legitimate. Yet tension persists between viewing such conformity as a conscious strategy or a structural necessity. This research aligns itself with that debate by examining how Gandhi and Thatcher navigated, reinforced, or subverted these gendered expectations through their governance practices. By combining theoretical contributions from feminist political thought (eg. Judith Butler), leadership psychology (eg. Bass, Fiedler, Vroom & Yetton), and methodological innovations from comparative and discursive approaches (eg. Bartlett & Vavrus, Fairclough), this thesis builds on and bridges scholarly work across the disciplines of gender studies, political executive authority theory, and postcolonial historiography.

Chapter One lays the theoretical and methodological groundwork. It introduces the concepts of gender performativity and transactional versus transformational leadership and connects them to the cases of Thatcher and Gandhi. The chapter also presents a historiographical review of existing scholarship in the field. While much academic work has focused either on gender performativity or on premiership style, the integration of both perspectives in the context of female executive leadership remains underexplored. This chapter addresses that gap by outlining how this thesis contributes an original analytical synthesis. In addition, the methodological tools are explained: Critical Discourse Analysis as developed by Norman Fairclough, and the Comparative Case Study method by Bartlett and Vavrus. These methods allow for a context-sensitive reading of rhetorical material across different civic and cultural settings and offer a means of comparing gendered political

authority across time and place.

Chapter Two focuses on the case of Indira Gandhi and applies the theoretical frameworks of Judith Butler and Bernard M. Bass to examine her manner of rule in the context of gender and governance. It considers how Gandhi's political discourse and self-presentation can be understood through the concepts of gender performativity and transformational/transactional leadership style. The chapter addresses the sub-question relating to the manifestation of gendered leadership in Gandhi's governmental career. Chapter Three turns to the case of Margaret Thatcher and similarly applies the combined theoretical approach to analyze her style of governance and public persona. Drawing on rhetorical material, the chapter explores how gender norms and leadership practices interacted in the context of British politics. It engages with the sub-question concerning Thatcher's gendered executive performance and its discursive construction. Chapter Four provides a comparative analysis of the two case studies. Using the Comparative Case Study method, it investigates cross-case patterns and divergences, structured across the micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis. This chapter examines the broader implications of context, institutional settings, and individual agency in shaping gendered leadership performances. By comparing two prominent female leaders from contrasting political and historical contexts, one operating within a postimperial Global North setting and the other within a postcolonial Global South framework, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of gender-coded styles of governance across different systems of power and cultural expectations. The final chapter synthesizes the insights from the case studies and comparative analysis to formulate an answer to the central research question. It reflects on the theoretical contributions of combining Butler's and Bass's frameworks and considers the broader relevance of the study. The conclusion also outlines limitations of the conducted research and directions for future work on the relationship between gender, leadership, and administrative discourse. The remainder of this introduction provides the conceptual and historical foundation necessary to contextualize the thesis and concludes with a presentation of the sub-questions that structure the study.

In order to properly contextualize the analysis in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, it is important to present relevant background information on Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher, as well as the national political contexts and histories within which their premiership took shape. This overview serves as a foundation for the thesis and avoids repetition in the subsequent chapters.

Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime

Minister of India after independence from the United Kingdom, and thus grew up in a politically active environment. In 1959, she became president of the Indian National Congress, the organization founded by her father and the dominant political force in India at the time, thereby increasing her influence within it.[1] Indira Gandhi served two terms as Prime Minister of India: her first from 1966 to 1977, and her second from 1980 until her assassination in 1984. Her initial term was marked by a series of significant developments. Early on, she implemented sweeping economic reforms, including the nationalization of fourteen major commercial banks. She also promoted agricultural reform and technological innovation through the Green Revolution, which led to a dramatic increase in India's food production. In terms of foreign policy, Indira Gandhi pursued a strategy of non-alignment while maintaining close ties with the Soviet Union, especially during the Cold War tensions of the 1970s. She sought to elevate India's position as a leader of the developing world, exemplified by her prominent role in the Non-Aligned Movement.[2] Gandhi's decisive intervention in the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, resulting in the creation of Bangladesh, was a landmark achievement that significantly increased India's regional influence and popularity. However, her alignment with the Soviet Union strained India's relations with the United States, particularly under the Nixon administration.[3] In 1975, she was found guilty of electoral malpractice. In response, she declared a state of emergency, during which governmental opponents were imprisoned, press freedoms were curtailed, and her son Sanjay Gandhi oversaw a controversial forced sterilization campaign.[4] Public discontent grew, and in the 1977 elections she was defeated by the Janata Party, bringing her first term to an end.

After a brief period in opposition, Gandhi returned to power in 1980 following the collapse of the Janata government. Her second term was dominated by escalating tensions in Punjab, where Sikh separatists were demanding greater autonomy. In 1984, they occupied the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest site in Sikhism. In response, Gandhi authorized Operation Blue Star, a military assault on the temple that resulted in hundreds of casualties and provoked widespread anger, particularly within the Sikh community. On 31 October 1984, Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in retaliation, an event that triggered

[1] Katharine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 33.
[2] Ramesh Thakur, *In Defence of New India: Foreign Policy Under Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1986), 67.
[3] Thakur, *In Defende of New India,* 111.
[4] Frank, *Indira*, 180.

violent anti-Sikh riots across India in which thousands were killed.[5]

Margaret Thatcher grew up in Grantham, a small town in eastern England. Her father, Alfred Roberts, was a prominent figure within the local community and served as an important role model during her formative years.[6] Key values that would later come to define her political leadership, such as hard work and self-discipline, were instilled in her from an early age. Thatcher initially studied chemistry at the University of Oxford, but later pursued a career in law after completing her legal studies. Her political journey began in the 1950s when she joined the Conservative Party. In 1959, she was elected Member of Parliament for Finchley. Quickly gaining recognition within the party, she was appointed Minister of Education and Science in 1970 under the government of Edward Heath. Following internal party disputes and electoral defeats, Thatcher became the first woman to lead a major British political party in 1975. In 1979, amid a backdrop of economic crisis and social unrest, she led the Conservative Party to a general election victory and assumed office as the first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

When Thatcher came to power in the United Kingdom, the country was in the midst of a deep economic crisis marked by high unemployment rates. The policies she implemented in response became popularly known as Thatcherism, characterized by several key elements.[7] First, the privatization of state-owned enterprises. This stemmed from her belief that the government held too much influence over the economy, and her aim was to modernize and revitalize economic activity. Second, the restriction of trade union power, exemplified by the confrontation with the National Union of Mineworkers, culminating in the Miners' Strike of 1984–1985. Third, a policy of tax cuts and deregulation, which, although reducing income taxes, disproportionately affected lower-income groups due to an increase in value-added tax (VAT). Finally, the introduction of the Poll Tax in 1989, a highly unpopular measure requiring all citizens to pay a uniform amount regardless of income. This provoked widespread protests and riots in 1990 and was a significant factor contributing to her eventual resignation.

In the field of foreign policy and international relations, several notable events and relationships must be highlighted. The Falklands War in 1982, which the United Kingdom won through a direct military operation against Argentina, significantly boosted Thatcher's popularity. Her close partnership with United States President Ronald Reagan (in office from

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[5] Gyan Prakash, *Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy's Turning Point* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 16.
[6] Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume One: Not for Turning* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 30-33.
[7] Eric J. Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 17.

1981 to 1989) is equally well known, a friendship founded on a shared right-wing economic vision and strong opposition to communism. Moreover, Thatcher remained deeply skeptical of further political integration among European nations, even though the United Kingdom continued its membership of the European Economic Community.[8] In November 1990, facing internal party dissent and declining popularity, she resigned as Prime Minister. Nevertheless, Thatcher remained politically active, publishing several memoirs, and ultimately passed away on 8 April 2013 at the age of 87.

The colonial past and its postcolonial legacies played a fundamental role in shaping both Indira Gandhi's and Margaret Thatcher's leadership trajectories. India was formally a colony of the United Kingdom from 1858 until its independence in 1947, during which it served primarily as a source of raw materials and agricultural products for the British economy, while also providing a vast market for British manufactured goods.[9] Colonial rule entrenched a system of economic exploitation, civic subjugation, and social hierarchy that favored British interests and marginalized local autonomy. India's economy was reoriented to supply goods such as cotton, tea, and opium, and millions of Indian soldiers served in British imperial armies around the world.[10]

In the aftermath of decolonization, Indira Gandhi's leadership was deeply marked by the necessity to forge a cohesive national identity in a newly sovereign and highly diverse society. The enduring effects of colonial rule, including economic inequality, religious divisions, and institutional hierarchies, presented significant challenges to nation-building efforts.[11] Gandhi's strong emphasis on central authority, national unity, and economic self-sufficiency can be understood within this context of overcoming colonial fragmentation. Her foreign policy orientation toward the Non-Aligned Movement and the assertion of India's autonomy on the global stage further reflected the postcolonial imperative to resist neocolonial influence and defend sovereignty.

In contrast, Margaret Thatcher led a country grappling with the loss of imperial power and the declining prestige associated with Britain's former global dominance. Following the decolonization waves of the 1950s and 1960s, the United Kingdom faced an internal crisis of

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[8] Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 81-82.
[9] Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2017), 110.
[10] Bose & Jalal, *Modern South Asia,* 115.
[11] Tithi Bhattacharya, *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 211.

identity, exacerbated by economic stagnation and shifting demographics due to immigration from former colonies.[12] Thatcher's leadership sought to restore a sense of national pride by emphasizing traditional values, economic liberalization, and the reinforcement of state authority.[13] Her skepticism toward deeper European integration and her rhetorical appeals to British exceptionalism can be seen as efforts to reframe Britain's role in a post-imperial world. In both cases, colonial and postcolonial realities were not distant historical backdrops, but active forces that shaped governmental strategies and ideological positions. While Gandhi's leadership was oriented toward constructing a postcolonial future for a newly independent state, Thatcher's political project focused on redefining Britain's self-image in the wake of imperial retreat. These contrasting frameworks reveal how historical structures continued to influence leadership approaches even decades after the end of formal colonialism.

Research question and sub-questions

The central research question of this thesis is as follows: How does the application of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Bernard M. Bass's leadership style framework, through Critical Discourse Analysis and Comparative Case Studies of archival material from Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, uncover the influence of gender performativity on their leadership styles and their contextual differences?

The sub-questions of the thesis are presented below according to the four different chapters.

Chapter 1:

- How can Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Bernard M. Bass's leadership framework be applied to analyze the relationship between gender norms and leadership style in the political careers of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi?
- In what ways does existing academic literature on gender performativity and leadership, particularly in the contexts of the United Kingdom and India, reveal gaps that this thesis seeks to address?

[12] Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 287.
[13] Young, *Postcolonialism*, 288-289.

- How do Critical Discourse Analysis and the Comparative Case Study method facilitate a contextualized and theoretically grounded examination of Thatcher's and Gandhi's gendered leadership performances?
- What are the methodological implications of using rhetorical sources such as speeches, interviews, and opinion pieces in analyzing the performative and strategic dimensions of political leadership?

Chapter 2:

- In what ways did gender performativity manifest in the leadership style and public rhetoric of Indira Gandhi?

Chapter 3:

- In what ways did gender performativity manifest in the leadership style and public rhetoric of Margaret Thatcher?

Chapter 4:

- How do Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, in similar and different ways, shape female leadership within their respective patriarchal political systems, from the perspective of gender performativity and leadership style?
- How do the interactions between personal agency and structural contexts at the micro, meso, and macro levels shape Thatcher and Gandhi's strategies of female leadership from the perspective of gender performativity and leadership style?
- How do Thatcher and Gandhi reproduce and transform gendered repertoires of political authority across contexts and temporalities, and how do these transformations reveal the limits and potential of performative female leadership from the perspective of gender performativity and leadership style?

Chapter 1
Theoretical framework, historiography, methodology and source criticism

1.1 Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis, the theoretical framework is outlined, focusing on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and Bernard M. Bass's theory of transactional and transformational leadership. This is followed by a historiographical overview that traces the academic development of these theories, with particular emphasis on the contexts of the United Kingdom and India. The historiography not only identifies key trends and debates in the existing literature but also highlights gaps in the academic field, specifically the lack of integrated studies on gender performativity and leadership style in political settings. This thesis positions itself within this gap, aiming to contribute to the scholarly conversation by bridging these perspectives. The methodology section explains the combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Comparative Case Study (CCS) approach to systematically examine the leadership styles of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi. Finally, the source criticism section addresses the specific characteristics and limitations of the primary sources used, highlighting the context dependence and the strategic, performative nature of political speeches, opinion pieces, and interviews. Through this structure, Chapter 1lays the groundwork for the analyses in Chapters Two to Four by introducing the theoretical and methodological lens.

1.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical concept central to the research is gender performativity by Judith Butler. Butler conceptualizes gender as a 'performative act,' emphasizing that gender identity is constructed through actions, language, and behaviors.[14] Instead of treating gender as a fixed attribute, Butler highlights the role of language in shaping and reinforcing gender norms. Language expresses and actively constructs gender identities by giving meaning to these norms through discourse.[15] Furthermore, Butler advocates for a subversive approach to gender norms, arguing that by exposing the performative nature of gender, it becomes possible to

[14] Sara Salih, 'On Judith Butler and Performativity', *Judith Butler*, 2002, 57.
[15] Salih, 57.

challenge and resist its oppressive structures.[16] The theory has a Western place of origin and has been applied to various case studies and generalized in this academic literature on gender theory. However, the theory is already substantive in the way it relates to prevailing social norms in different cultural contexts and environments. This makes the concept free to apply to the case studies of Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Gandhi in India without too great a risk of Western bias or established epistemologies. When examining gender performativity through the lens of prevailing social norms, it is crucial to consider the impact of colonial history, as it may shape a unique dynamic between the colonized country and its former colonizer in the formation of social norms. India has a history of colonization by the United Kingdom, so when analyzing the different perspectives on female leadership in both contexts, it is important to consider this in the application of Butler's concept.

To further refine the application of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity to the case studies of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, it is useful to consider the dynamic interplay between individual agency and structural constraints within their respective political environments. Butler emphasizes that gender is not simply an expression of identity but is continuously produced and regulated by social norms, cultural expectations, and institutional power structures. This means that Thatcher and Gandhi's leadership must be examined as personal choices shaped in tandem with strategic navigations of deeply ingrained gendered expectations within their societies. To analyze Butler's concept in a focused and connective way based on historical sources of both political figures, it is important to theorize "leadership style." To do this, I use Bernard M. Bass' theory that divides executive authority into two contrasting forms: transactional- and transformational leadership. Bass has shaped his theory in the context of applied psychology and organizational behavioral sciences and applies the model to corporate-level governance in particular. However, in his work, Bass emphasizes that the theory also has application to specific political leadership.

Transactional leadership is characterized by a focus on rewards and punishments, with leaders engaging in an explicit exchange with followers.[17] It focuses on stability and maintaining the status quo. Politicians promote the reward/punishment dynamic through, for example, tax breaks and subsidies. In the framework of tenure, this means that transactional leadership occurs mainly during periods of political calm, when leaders pursue short-term goals rather than a reforming long-term vision and are characterized by conservative rhetoric

[16] Salih, 65.
[17] Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 2nd ed (Mahwah, N.J: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 6.

as a result.[18] Transformational leadership, on the other hand, focuses on inspiring followers, developing a shared vision, and intellectual stimulation to promote innovation. Components include charisma and intellectual stimulation. In the setting of political approach to ruling, this means that transformational leaders seek to change social issues, such as prevailing norms and values, through mobilizing citizens to achieve collective goals.[19] Unlike transactional leadership, politicians in this setting use progressive rhetoric and symbolism.

The theory provides insight into how governmental leaders relate to conservatism/progressiveness regarding norms and values. Since this research is about gender norms, by using this approach to premiership I can insightfully test whether Thatcher and Gandhi adopt transactional/transformative attitudes as leaders and in what way this affects conservative or progressive attitudes toward gender norms in their performativity.

1.3 Historiography

This historiography not only outlines key developments in the academic study of gender performativity and leadership, but also identifies a significant gap in the literature: the lack of integrated analyses that examine how gender performativity and style of governance intersect in the political careers of female leaders. By focusing on the cases of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi in their respective national contexts, this thesis positions itself as a unique contribution to both gender theory and leadership studies. Prevailing approaches and scholarly perspectives are compared and analyzed in relation to one another. While existing research has contributed significantly to understanding either gender performativity or leadership styles, this thesis introduces an original contribution by synthesizing these two bodies of theory into a single analytical framework.

Furthermore, this research engages directly with a key tension in the academic literature: whether gendered performances by female leaders function as strategic tools of political legitimation, or whether they reflect submission to broader structural constraints imposed by patriarchal systems. Across both the British and Indian contexts, scholars widely agree that women in politics must conform to masculine-coded norms in order to be perceived as legitimate leaders. However, the question remains whether such performative adaptations

[18] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership,* 9.
[19] Bass en Riggio, 82.

reinforce or subvert existing power structures. This thesis intervenes in that debate by analyzing precisely how Thatcher and Gandhi navigated this tension, and whether their performative strategies served to uphold or challenge the gendered boundaries of political authority in their respective systems.

Judith Butler (1990)[20] redefines gender as an action rather than a fixed trait. Through language and behavior, gender identity is produced and reinforced. Butler emphasizes the power of discourse in shaping gender norms and advocates for a subversive approach to expose and challenge their oppressive nature. Finally, in her 1990 work, Butler lays the foundations for an intersectional approach to her concept (gender in the context of race, class etc.), something that caused more scientific influence in later work on gender performativity. The intersectionality within gender performativity receives more attention in more modern works on the concept, for example as shown in research by Halferty and Leeney from 2022.[21] Apart from an intersectional approach, the concept has gone through an interdisciplinary development over the years, integrating Butler's theory into fields such as phenomenology and anthropology in order to better understand the dynamics in gender performativity in this way. In addition, scholars seek a more practical elaboration of the concept by applying it to diverse case studies in later research (e.g. how in drag performances gender norms are reinforced and thereby challenged in operation). An example of such work is an article by Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp from 2004[22] which illustrates gender as an action, a performance of a series of actions through which gender becomes a construct in social reality.

Application of the concept in the academic literature occurs not only in gender expressions, but also, for example, in the context of gender norms in sports as argued by Eric Anderson (2005)[23] or in its application to child rearing in the 2003 book by Bronwyn Davies.[24] This indicates that gender performativity is a broadly applicable concept that seeps into many different aspects and parts of society and human life. The evolution of the debate on gender performativity in the academic domain is thus characterized not so much by major disagreements between authors or adjustments in the content of the concept, but rather by

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[20] Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity," *Thinking Gender* (1990).
[21] J. Paul Halferty and Cathy Leeney, eds., *Analysing Gender in Performance* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85574-1.
[22] Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, "Chicks with Dicks, Men in Dresses: What It Means to Be a Drag Queen," *Journal of Homosexuality* 46, no. 3–4 (2004): 113–33, https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v46n03_07.
[23] Eric Anderson, *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005).
[24] Bronwyn Davies, *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales: Preschool Children and Gender* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2003).

expansion and application to practice to make the theory more tangible. Butler herself also similarly relates to the evolution of her own concept: in her 1993 work[25], Butler discusses the material dimensions of gender in social practice, and in her most recent academic contribution (2024)[26], the application of gender performativity to contemporary issues. This thesis expands this body of work by explicitly connecting Butler's performativity theory with political leadership analysis, specifically through Bernard Bass's transformational and transactional leadership theory, an intersection largely missing in current literature.

A number of studies have examined gender performativity in the context of Margaret Thatcher's political career. These include research by J.C.A.P. Ribberink (2005)[27], Blair Williams (2024)[28], and Tamara Aguilera Cartagena (2023)[29], each of whom explores how Thatcher's leadership identity was shaped by gendered expectations. While their methodologies and emphases differ, all three converge on the argument that Thatcher's public persona relied heavily on the masculinization of her leadership style. In order to gain legitimacy within the patriarchal political system, she adopted traits traditionally coded as masculine, such as assertiveness and resilience. At the same time, her outward appearance, including her clothing and hairstyle, remained consistent with conventional femininity, reflecting a strategic balance between masculine authority and feminine acceptability.

The extent to which this gender performance was intentional, however, remains contested. Cartagena presents it as a deliberate political strategy, while others interpret it as an adaptive response to constraining societal norms. These differences reflect the broader academic debate between structure and agency: to what degree are gender performances consciously chosen, and how far are they shaped by institutional and cultural constraints? Within British feminist scholarship, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity forms a central reference point. Her work has informed numerous studies that connect performative gender to broader feminist objectives, such as achieving equality in the labor market.

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[25] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[26] Judith Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024).
[27] J.C.A.P. Ribberink, "I Don't Think of Myself as the First Woman Prime Minister: Gender, Identity and Image in Margaret Thatcher's Career," in *Making Reputations: Power, Persuasion and the Individual in Modern British Politics*, ed. Richard Toye and Julie Gottlieb (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005).
[28] Blair Williams, "The Unsettling of Women Prime Ministers: A Gendered Analysis of Political Cartoons," *Women's Studies in Communication* 47, no. 4 (2024): 480–506, https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2024.2396308.
[29] Tamara Aguilera Cartagena, "Gender Self-Representation in the Discourse of Margaret Thatcher Before, During and After Her Role as the First Female Prime Minister in the UK" (master's thesis, Universidad de Chile, 2023), https://doi.org/10.58011/sg0q-zp79.

Beverley Skeggs (1997)[30], for instance, demonstrates how class intersects with gender in shaping notions of respectability, thereby advancing one of the earliest intersectional readings of performativity. Rosalind Gill (2017)[31] similarly explores how postfeminist media cultures reinforce and subvert gender norms simultaneously, applying Butler's insights to the realm of cultural sensibility and representation.

Attention has also been drawn to the structural marginalization of gender within political institutions. Catherine Hoskyns (1996)[32] examines how legal and policy frameworks often fail to incorporate gendered perspectives, while Judith Squires (1999)[33] emphasizes the exclusion of gender performativity from mainstream political theory. These critiques are echoed in Meryl Kenny's analysis (2013)[34] of gender and political recruitment, which shows how party structures in the UK systematically reproduce gendered barriers to leadership. Sarah Childs (2008)[35] argues that female politicians must adopt masculine-coded behaviors to be perceived as legitimate, a paradox further unpacked in her collaborative work with Rosie Campbell (2015)[36], where media representations are shown to constrain women's agency through normative scripts. Mary Beard (2017)[37] extends this argument historically, contending that the deep-rooted association between power and masculinity delegitimizes women in public authority roles.

There are several works in academic literature that have specifically researched gender performativity in Indira Gandhi's political approach to ruling, including Preeti Kumar (2021)[38], Mariya Y. Omelicheva and Brittnee Carter (2024)[39], and Ariel Katz (2012)[40]. Kumar

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[30] Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997).

[31] Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 147–166, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407075898.

[32] Catherine Hoskyns, Integrating Gender: Women, Law, and Politics in the European Union (London: Verso, 1996).

[33] Judith Squires, Gender in Political Theory (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

[34] Meryl Kenny, Gender and Political Recruitment: Theorizing Institutional Change (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137271945.

[35] Sarah Childs, Women and British Party Politics: Descriptive, Substantive and Symbolic Representation, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203019443.

[36] Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs, "Conservatism, Feminisation and the Representation of Women in UK Politics," *British Politics* 10, no. 2 (2015): 148–168, https://doi.org/10.1057/bp.2015.18.

[37] Mary Beard, *Women & Power: A Manifesto* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017).

[38] Preeti Kumar, "Gendered Lives: A Study of Two Biographies of Indira Gandhi," *Samyukta: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2021): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.53007/SJGC.2021.V6.I1.17.

[39] Mariya Y. Omelicheva and Brittnee Carter, "The Queens' Gambit: Women Leadership, Gender Expectations, and Interstate Conflict," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 26, no. 1 (2024): 3–21, https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481231221474.

[40] Ariel Katz, "Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir, and Indira Gandhi's Actions and Rhetoric Regarding Feminism and Gender During Their Ascent to Power" (senior thesis, Claremont McKenna College, 2012).

compares two different biographies of Gandhi and concludes that, on the one hand, she legitimizes her political authority by conforming to traditional expectations of women regarding self-sacrifice and maternal care, while on the other hand, she presents herself as an independent and assertive leader who actively challenges gender norms. This duality is also evident in studies by Omelicheva and Carter and by Katz, which suggest that Gandhi deliberately distanced herself from feminist discourse, thereby reinforcing her public image through a hardened display of masculinity. In terms of research objective and content, Katz's work comes closest to this thesis within the existing literature, but differs in its theoretical foundation. While Katz focuses on gender expressions in relation to feminism, this thesis specifically addresses the concept of gender performativity within the setting of political leadership.

One of the first academic contributions addressing gender norms in India appears in research from 1989[41], which analyzes the colonial period and argues that this era had already shaped the patriarchal structures that laid the groundwork for later generations of inequality in opportunity. Social reform movements, as examined by Urvashi Butalia (1998)[42], reveal how India's independence struggle created new spaces for women to assert leadership, while at the same time reinforcing traditional expectations. These movements, although liberatory in some aspects, contributed to the consolidation of norms that shaped the performativity of female leaders in subsequent decades. Later research shows how these gender norms and the expectations tied to them have led to disproportionate representation of women in politics. A 2015 study[43] that for the first time explicitly discusses gender performativity in the Indian context concludes from an intersectional perspective that women from lower social classes in India are particularly burdened by oppressive gender norms that assign them to domestic, traditional roles and marginalize those who do not conform. Women from higher social classes are generally less vulnerable to these norms and face fewer restrictions in public life. This perspective is further expanded in Jyoti Puri's work (1999)[44], which critically examines how narratives around gender and sexuality construct female subjectivity in postcolonial

[41] Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989).
[42] Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).
[43] Annamma Joy, Russell Belk, and Rishi Bhardwaj, "Judith Butler on Performativity and Precarity: Exploratory Thoughts on Gender and Violence in India," *Journal of Marketing Management* 31, no. 15–16 (2015): 1739–1746, https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1078395.
[44] Jyoti Puri, *Woman, Body, Desire in Post-Colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1999), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203906620.

India. Puri shows how gender performativity intersects with class and regional factors, shaping both the constraints and the possibilities for women in politics.

Despite the patriarchal system in India which generally results in a reduced percentage of female participation in governmental bodies, research on women in politics shows that, on the contrary, leaders consciously use gender norms in their performativity to legitimize governance and authority. In addition, the role of legislative gender quotas, as explored by Bina Agarwal (2010)[45], highlights how systemic interventions attempt to mitigate patriarchal constraints. However, these measures often force women into stereotypical gendered roles to align with societal expectations, echoing themes of performativity. Carole Spary (2007)[46] explicitly identifies two forms of gender performativity that female executive leaders try to strategically identify with: 'motherly leader' and 'sacrificial leader'. The former refers to the representation of women leaders as caring and protective figures, which is similar to the mother figure in private spheres according to Indian gender norms. In this, women leaders use the cultural norm in which women are seen as guardians of the country's moral values. Partha Chatterjee (1993)[47] critiques the cultural representation of women in leadership and argues that nationalist discourses often cast women as embodiments of purity and moral authority, which further entrenches their performative roles as motherly or sacrificial figures. Gender performativity among women political leaders in India also manifests itself in the role of the sacrificial leader, in which women put aside their own interest for the good of the nation. This role is often symbolically linked to Indian heroic figures. More recent research from 2017[48] critically evaluates these traditional premiership roles and highlights a paradox: while adopting such roles can empower women politically, they simultaneously limit autonomy and shape expectations around how leadership should be performed. This creates a cycle in which women leaders remain confined within a gender stereotype, unable to fully break free from its performative constraints.

Another relevant contribution from 2023[49] provides a critical perspective on how

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[45] Bina Agarwal, *Gender and Green Governance: The Political Economy of Women's Presence Within and Beyond Community Forestry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[46] Carole Spary, "Female Political Leadership in India," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 45, no. 3 (2007): 253–277, https://doi.org/10.1080/14662040701516821.
[47] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691201429.
[48] Yonjoo Cho, Rajashi Ghosh, Judy Y. Sun, and Gary N. McLean, eds., *Current Perspectives on Asian Women in Leadership: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54996-5.
[49] Tasnim Jarin and Aftab Ur Rahaman Zahin, "Gender Performativity in Inter-Caste Relationship in the Indian Hindu Culture: A Postcolonial Gender Study," *Gender and Women's Studies* 3, no. 1 (2023): 37–51, https://doi.org/10.31557/GWS.2023.3.1.37-51.

gender norms intersect with caste-based oppression in India. The study demonstrates how lower-caste women face even stricter performative constraints, which further restrict their access to political power compared to upper-caste women. A related study by A. Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi (2010)[50] expands gender performativity research beyond cisgender women and explores how trans women in India navigate public space and performative expectations. While cisgender female politicians struggle with the 'motherly' or 'sacrificial' archetypes, trans women face additional erasure and systemic barriers that prevent them from engaging in political leadership at all.

This section of historiography describes the academic debate and development in the field of political leadership studies. It introduces general theories by several authors and outlines how they relate to one another, with a particular focus on the political contexts of the United Kingdom and India. In addition, this scholarly debate is embedded within the framework of this thesis, which draws upon Bass's theory of transactional and transformational leadership. Thatcher's approach to ruling has been examined through her centralization of power, ideological rigidity, and gendered self-presentation. Anthony King (2007)[51] assesses how she redefined the Prime Minister's Office by concentrating authority and reshaping the British political landscape. In contrast, Peter Riddell (1993)[52] highlights internal resistance within her party and describes her leadership as largely transactional, depending on loyalty in exchange for rewards rather than consensus. Nikolas Rose (1999)[53] situates Thatcher's neoliberalism within a broader psychological context, suggesting that her governance reinforced individual responsibility as a mode of rule. Anna Coote and Polly Pattullo (1990)[54] critique her reluctance to engage with feminist narratives, arguing that she deliberately distanced herself from gender equality agendas to maintain credibility within a patriarchal political environment. Sylvia Shaw (2020)[55] further examines how Thatcher's rhetorical choices conformed to male-coded communication norms, reinforcing a

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[50] A. Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, "Gender Performativity in (un)Safe Space: The Narratives of Male to Female Indian Trans," *Journal of Social Inclusion* 1, no. 1 (2010): 45–56.

[51] Anthony King, *The British Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[52] Peter Riddell, *The Unfulfilled Prime Minister: Tony Blair's Quest for a Legacy* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2005).

[53] Rose, Nikolas. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self.* 2nd ed. London: Free Association Books, 1999.

[54] Coote, Anna, and Polly Pattullo. *Power and Privilege: Women in the British Parliament.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990.

[55] Sylvia Shaw, *Women, Language and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780174.

masculinized political identity.

Gandhi's style of governance combined dynastic politics, emergency rule, and fluctuating gender performativity. Bidyut Chakrabarty (2008)[56] argues that she frequently bypassed institutional checks by leaning on charismatic legitimacy and centralized authority. This position is supported by Paul Brass (1994)[57], who critiques her increasing authoritarianism, particularly during the Emergency from 1975 to 1977. In relation to gender, Geraldine Forbes (1996)[58] shows how Gandhi alternated between maternal nationalism and assertive toughness, adjusting her gender performance based on political necessity. Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu (1998)[59] similarly explore how her gendered public image was shaped by both domestic cultural norms and international feminist discourses.

Early theories of governance emerged in the 19th century and often rested on the notion of the so-called Great Man Theory. A key text associated with this line of thinking is by Thomas Carlyle (1841)[60], which conceptualizes leadership as rooted in innate heroic male traits, largely detached from institutional structures. Related to this perspective is work by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1850)[61], who applies the Great Man concept in a series of essays on figures such as Napoleon and Plato. An earlier philosophical foundation for this idea can be found in Johann Gottfried von Herder (1968)[62], who argues that individual figures profoundly shape cultural and political development. These early theories are relevant to the present thesis in how they frame leadership as male, charismatic, and exceptional, effectively excluding women from legitimate political power. By analyzing gender within this historical tradition, the thesis reflects on how Thatcher and Gandhi both disrupted and reinforced these paradigms.

From the mid-20th century onward, scholarly attention shifted from individual agency to institutional factors in shaping leadership. Political parties, parliaments, and bureaucracies

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[56] Chakrabarty, Bidyut. *Constitutional Democracy and Politics in India: A Study of the Congress.* London: Routledge, 2008. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203893286.
[57] Paul R. Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139170732.
[58] Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139170992.
[59] Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu, eds., *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia* (New York: Routledge, 1998), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429497784.
[60] Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. Henry David Gray (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906).
[61] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1850).
[62] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, trans. T. Churchill (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

were increasingly viewed as structures that both limit and enable governance in democratic and authoritarian regimes. This trend is reflected in studies such as Samuel Beer (1965)[63], who examines British political culture, and Rajni Kothari (1970)[64], who analyzes the institutional landscape of Indian politics. However, other scholars add nuance by emphasizing traditional social hierarchies and cultural norms. Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph (1967)[65] argue that in India, deeply embedded social structures exert more influence on leadership than formal institutions. In a different context, Richard Rose (1970)[66] emphasizes that personal dynamics and communicative ability play a key role in shaping political authority in the UK.

From the 1960s/1970s onward, scholarship began to address political leadership as a behavioral phenomenon, focusing on the dynamic between leaders and followers. This development is reflected in the emergence of transactional and transformational leadership theory, which plays a central role in the framework of this thesis. Bernard Bass (1985; 2006)[67] distinguishes between leadership based on exchange (transactional) and leadership driven by visionary change (transformational). Other key works in this behavioral tradition include Victor Vroom and Philip Yetton (1973)[68], who link decision-making to participatory processes, and Fred Fiedler (1967)[69], who emphasizes the contingency of leadership effectiveness on contextual factors. In the Indian context, similar debates unfold with additional layers of cultural and philosophical reflection. Arvind Sharma (1996)[70] introduces traditional Indian ethical frameworks such as dharma and karma into modern leadership analysis. A more recent example is found in Radhakrishnan Pillai (2013)[71], who draws from ancient Indian texts to develop principles for contemporary management and governance. The application of such culturally embedded perspectives to leadership theory offers valuable insights for understanding Gandhi's approach, particularly in contrast to more secular and

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[63] Samuel Beer, *Modern British Politics: A Study of Parties and Pressure Groups* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).
[64] Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970).
[65] Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).
[66] Richard Rose, *The Prime Minister in a Shrinking World* (London: Macmillan, 1970).
[67] Bernard M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (New York: Free Press, 1985); Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2006).
[68] Victor Vroom and Philip Yetton, *Leadership and Decision-Making* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).
[69] Fred E. Fiedler, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).
[70] Arvind Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought: An Introduction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[71] Radhakrishnan Pillai, *Corporate Chanakya: Successful Management the Chanakya Way* (Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 2013).

institutional framings of power in the British context.

This thesis builds on the most recent developments in leadership studies, where individual agency is examined in relation to sociopolitical and institutional structures, with gender norms as a central analytical lens. By integrating Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity with Bernard Bass's typology of leadership, it introduces a novel framework for understanding how political legitimacy is constructed through both identity and governance. In doing so, this research addresses a significant gap in the literature by offering a comparative, intersectional analysis of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi. It demonstrates how performative gender identity and style of governance are not only shaped by patriarchal systems but also actively co-constitute the exercise of political power.

1.4 Methodology

This research employs a multi-method approach that combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Norman Fairclough, with the Comparative Case Study (CSS) methodology, as outlined by Bartlett and Vavrus. These methodologies provide a structured framework for analyzing the leadership styles of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, allowing for a systematic examination of how language, discourse, and socio-political contexts shape and reinforce gender performativity in political authority.

The first part of the thesis examines gender performativity in the individual leadership styles of Thatcher and Gandhi and how this relates to prevailing gender norms in the context of both the United Kingdom and India. The methodology used to interpret and analyze the primary source material of Thatcher and Gandhi is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), inspired by the work of Norman Fairclough. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a research approach that examines language and discourse in relation to power, ideology, and social inequality..[72] CDA focuses on how discursive practices reproduce and legitimize social structures, and provides tools to deconstruct and expose these dynamics.[73] CDA offers a deeper and more theoretically grounded approach to the research than regular discourse analysis because it describes language use while situating it within its social context. This makes it useful for the study of gender performativity and transactional/transformative leadership styles, as analysis within specific social settings is crucial for the separate

[72] Teun A. Van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, 1st ed. (Wiley, 2015), 466, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118584194.ch22.
[73] Van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," 470.

examinations of both Thatcher's and Gandhi's primary source material.

After collecting historical source material the next step in discourse analysis is to interpret and analyze the data. In the context of Butler's concept, the analysis focuses on so-called performative acts: the use of language, behaviors, and symbolic expressions that relate to the identity formation of gender. It also examines the ways in which prevailing gender norms are enforced by Thatcher and Gandhi, as well as the ways in which these norms are challenged. In both case studies, the analysis centers on the prevailing gender norms of the time in the United Kingdom and India, and how these norms take shape in social reality with respect to the leadership roles adopted by both political figures.

The second part of this master's thesis zooms in on the two case studies on Thatcher and Gandhi at the case level and compares the two studies with respect to the concept of gender performativity and style of governmental leadership. This comparative analysis will be conducted using Bartlett and Vavrus' methodology called Comparative Case Studies (CSS) as described in the article called *Comparative Case Studies: An Innovative Approach* from 2017. CSS is like a deepening of traditional forms of case studies because of the extension of tracking phenomena over different time periods and locations.[74] The CSS method consists of three different so-called "axes of comparison." First, the horizontal comparison in which the analysis looks at similar phenomena (such as the concept of gender performativity) and examines how they develop in different social contexts, second, the vertical comparison that examines how interactions between different scales (e.g., national and global) and in what ways they influence each other, and finally, the transversal comparison that puts phenomena in a historical contextual perspective to find out changes or continuities.[75] A core feature of CCS is that it does not view phenomena as isolated, but places them within dynamic networks of power, social interactions and cultural dynamics. These characteristics make the method particularly suitable for studies in which historical backdrops and relationships are crucial.[76]

This study applies CCS to compare the leadership styles of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi within their respective settings in the United Kingdom and India. The horizontal comparison examines how gender norms and performativity shaped the tenure of both politicians in the different social contexts. The vertical axis analyzes the influence of national and global forces, for example colonialism (consider India's colonial past at the hands

[74] Lesley Bartlett en Frances Vavrus, "Comparative Case Studies: An Innovative Approach", *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education (NJCIE)* 1, nr. 1 (11 juli 2017): 7-8,
[75] Bartlett en Vavrus, "Comparative Case Studies: An Innovative Approach," 14.
[76] Bartlett en Vavrus, 9.

of the United Kingdom) and patriarchal structures. Cross-sectional comparison is used to identify historical continuities and changes in gender norms and leadership. To best understand the essence of the different comparisons in the context of this research, their content is explained in more detail in Chapter Four. By combining Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and Bernard M. Bass' theoretical framework on (political) leadership, CCS offers the opportunity to gain in-depth insights into the interplay between gender, power and national context. This methodology enhances the research by identifying and interpreting both the similarities and differences between Thatcher and Gandhi.

1.5 Source criticism

This section addresses the following sub-question: What are the methodological implications of using rhetorical sources such as speeches, interviews, and opinion pieces in analyzing the performative and strategic dimensions of political leadership? This thesis draws on three distinct types of historical sources: speeches, articles (authored by Gandhi and Thatcher themselves), and interviews. Each of these sources offers valuable insights for the analysis of the theoretical frameworks of Butler and Bass, yet they also carry specific implications that must be carefully considered when engaging with this historical inquiry. The first point to be made within the framework of source criticism concerns the neutrality of the material. As Natalie Zemon Davis pointed out in her 1987 work *Fiction in the Archives*, rhetorical sources such as speeches inherently lack neutrality. This is particularly true for political speeches like those delivered by Gandhi and Thatcher, which often serve as strategic acts of self-representation. On the one hand, this aligns well with the study of a concept such as gender performativity, which revolves around the deliberate enactment of identity within a social context. On the other hand, it is essential to keep in mind that such material does not necessarily reflect the speaker's authentic beliefs. Instead, these are constructed messages, shaped by ideological motives and tailored for a specific audience. Therefore, the analytical approach must remain sensitive to the performative and strategic nature of the sources rather than treating them as transparent reflections of personal ideology.

A second important point regarding the use of speeches, opinion pieces, and interviews is that this material is highly context-dependent. These texts are delivered or written at specific moments, for specific audiences, and with specific purposes in mind. This means that

it is crucial to consider when, where, and to whom the message is directed.[77] In the framework of source selection, it is therefore desirable that the sources come from different time periods, address different audiences, and are not solely focused on iconic moments or statements. The final point of source criticism concerning these types of historical sources is that they are influenced by media and framing. Since many speeches and interviews are disseminated through the media, processes such as journalistic selection and editing play a significant role in shaping how the message is received.[78] As a result, the source is already mediated through an additional layer of interpretation and construction. This has important implications for historical analysis, as it raises questions about authenticity, manipulation, and audience perception. Therefore, when selecting suitable sources, it is crucial to prioritize original versions, such as literal transcripts of speeches, over edited or reformatted versions published by media outlets. Engaging with the unaltered material allows for a more accurate and critical examination of how figures like Gandhi and Thatcher constructed their public personas and performed leadership. It also ensures that the analysis remains focused on their own rhetoric rather than interpretations imposed by external media actors.

[77] Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 56–58.
[78] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79*, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 128-130.

Chapter 2
Case Study Indira Gandhi

2.1 Introduction

In chapter two of this thesis, the case study on gender performativity in Indira Gandhi's political leadership style is elaborated based on primary source material. The results of the source research are structured based on the two theoretical frameworks that shape the lens of the analysis: gender performativity and transactional/transformational leadership. In addition, links are made between the theories discussed in order to deepen the analysis and offer unique insights compared to previous research. This chapter often uses quotes from the source material to clarify and reinforce the analysis. As further substantiated in chapter one, the sources were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis. The chapter begins with a brief summary of the historiography regarding the theory and the specific (geographical) context in order to interpret its academic relevance. It concludes by synthesizing the core findings and providing a comprehensive answer to the sub-question.

2.2 Summary of Historiography and Academic Relevance

Colonial structures and early social reform movements laid the foundation for modern gender norms in India. Historiographic research shows that the colonial period established a patriarchal order that set the tone for later generations. During the struggle for independence, nationalist movements did offer women new opportunities for governance, but at the same time they reaffirmed traditional role expectations. This double effect, both liberating and reinforcing, helped shape the way female leaders were expected to behave in the years that followed and contributed to the ongoing underrepresentation of women in politics. Indira Gandhi, India's first female prime minister, moved within this male-dominated political arena and developed a leadership style that was strongly influenced by existing gender norms. Her performativity was strategic: on the one hand she legitimized her authority by conforming to traditional ideals of female self-sacrifice and maternal care, while on the other hand she profiled herself as an independent, decisive leader who did not allow herself to be limited by conventional expectations. Gandhi explicitly avoided feminist discourse and instead cultivated a tough, 'masculine' manner of rule to reinforce her authority.

Carole Spary distinguishes two gender-performative archetypes for women in Indian

politics that are directly relevant to Gandhi's authority: the 'motherly' leader (a caring guardian of traditional moral values) and the 'self-sacrificing' leader (someone who completely sacrifices their own interests for the benefit of the nation). Both roles draw on nationalist discourses in which female leaders are presented as embodiments of purity and a sense of duty, but at the same time they impose clearly defined expectations. Gandhi's performativity was at the intersection of these archetypes: she positioned herself as the 'mother of the nation', while at the same time making political decisions that made her executive behavior authoritarian rather than self-sacrificing. Recent studies point to a paradox in this: while embracing a 'motherly' or 'self-sacrificing' role may confer legitimacy on female politicians in India, it simultaneously limits their autonomy as a leader. This also applies to Gandhi, whose performative choices both strengthened her authority and influenced her political freedom of movement. Existing research recognizes Gandhi's strategic gender performativity, but has limited research on how this relates to her governing style and the broader Indian political context. This analysis sheds light on how Gandhi both used and challenged gender performativity within the patriarchal framework of Indian politics, and how this shaped her premiership.

2.3 Gender Performativity and Indira Gandhi

Gandhi's relationship to the concept of "womanhood" does not only emerge when she becomes aware of socially constructed gender norms and their influence on her life, as well as the potential oppressive effects of external factors and power relations related to gender. In an article for a school magazine in 1957, Gandhi wrote about her youth and how, from a young age, she had to deal with feelings of youthfulness and so-called “being a girl” on the one hand, and a sense of duty and loyalty to her country on the other: “The struggle between love of the doll and pride in the ownership of such a lovely thing- and, as I thought, duty towards my country”.[79] This dilemma, in which playing with the doll symbolizes being a girl and reflects broader societal expectations of femininity, including in Indian society, in a way sets the tone for how Gandhi would later navigate her role as a female leader on a male-dominated global political stage. It raises the fundamental question of what gender implies in this framework: is the suppression of potential expressions of gender stereotypes desirable for the

[79] Indira Gadhi, “Childhood,” in *India: Speeches and Reminiscences* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 14.

greater good, or does it not pose an obstacle? Gandhi's awareness of what femininity means in social reality grows as she enters puberty. In 1959, Gandhi writes an article about this in a journal of the All-India Women's Conference), in which she says the following: “I had wanted to be a boy, but at sixteen the delight of being a woman began to unfold itself”.[80] The quote reveals a shift in her gender performativity: from identifying with boyish traits to embracing traditional femininity. It demonstrates that Gandhi becomes increasingly aware of the power of performative gender roles, setting in motion a development in her gender expression.

In the same 1959 article, Gandhi explores another dimension of womanhood: motherhood and the role of women in caring for children. She reflects on the deep sense of responsibility with which she cared for the baby of a mother in her immediate environment, who, at that time, was unable to do so herself. Written just a few years before the elections that would make her India’s first female prime minister, the article explicitly highlights the maternal instinct that compelled her to embrace this role with love and devotion. A prevailing norm regarding femininity within leadership discourse during the period in which Gandhi sought to establish her political authority was the desirability of “maternal” qualities in female leadership. The caring and self-sacrificing nature of this particular Indian ideal of motherhood reinforced legitimacy and could therefore be strategically employed. Based on Gandhi’s article and these normative expectations, it can be suggested that she consciously adopted a maternal role as political capital, using it to enhance her electoral popularity. This illustrates that gender performativity is not merely a reflection of societal norms but also a strategic tool for securing electoral acceptance.

From Gandhi's public rhetoric (such as speeches and interviews) it can be concluded that she had a strategic but also paradoxical relationship with (Western) feminist movements and feminism itself. Her statements and public appearances show how she rejected feminist positions when it was politically advantageous, while at other times she emphasized the necessity of gender equality. This paradoxical attitude was not just a personal conviction, but a conscious performative strategy that legitimized her exercise of power within a patriarchal society. This dynamic emerges, among other places, in a speech during the inauguration of the All-India Women's Conference Building Complex in 1980: “I have often said that I am not a feminist. Yet, in my concern for the underprivileged, how can I ignore women who, since the beginning of history, have been dominated over and discriminated against in social customs

[80] Indira Gadhi, “My Sixteenth Year,” in *India: Speeches and Reminiscences* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 15.

and in laws?" This quote illustrates the contradiction in her gender performativity. By explicitly distancing herself from feminism, she presented herself as a unique and independent female leader, separate from Western feminist movements. At the same time, she recognized that women have historically been oppressed and that this is a social problem that must be addressed. This double message allowed her to both navigate patriarchal structures and justify her leadership as a form of social improvement. A similar tactic is visible in a 1975 interview, in which she evades a feminist question with a smile: "She saw that I was trying to trap her into a 'women's lib' statement. Then, with a twinkle in her eye... 'Perhaps association of women with the field is the reason for the neglect... Let's say it is an interesting question which deserves further study'"[81]. By avoiding feminist framing, she subtly acknowledged the inequality without placing herself in an explicitly feminist camp. This strengthened her legitimacy within a political landscape in which feminism was often seen as too radical.

In addition, other sources concerning her rhetoric show that Gandhi strategically used her femininity by linking it to national identity, presenting the resilience and adaptability of Indian women as a strength that India itself embodies. This functioned as performative self-legitimization, with which she strengthened her governance without explicitly undermining traditional gender roles. At the same time, she distanced herself from feminism by criticizing Western views on female emancipation, arguing that freedom did not lie in imitating men, but within existing gender roles. Although this seemed progressive, it affirmed the status quo and perpetuated structural inequalities. Her attitude towards feminism was a conscious political strategy: by selectively acknowledging feminist themes while avoiding explicit activism, she appealed to both conservative and progressive voters. As a result, her gender performativity was not clearly defined but rather a flexible instrument to legitimize her authority in a male-dominated political landscape.

Indira Gandhi's gender performativity can be traced back not only to language (such as articles, speeches or interviews), but also to external characteristics such as clothing, accessories or whether or not she wears makeup. In the aforementioned article from 1975, the interviewer describes Gandhi's appearance as follows: "She wore a light cotton sari with a small figured design in moss green. The border was green and she had thonged green shoes on her bare feet. She wore no makeup, no jewelry."[82] Her simple, functional saris (traditional

[81] Francelia Butler, *The Editor's High Chair: Including an Interview with Madame Indira Gandhi*, *Children's Literature* 4 (1975): 8, https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.0.0772.
[82] Francelia Butler, "The Editor's High Chair: Including an Interview with Madame Indira Gandhi," *Children's Literature* 4 (1975): 3.

Indian women's clothing) symbolize traditional female approach to ruling, but her lack of makeup and jewelry minimizes feminization. This shows that Gandhi was devoted to feminine presentation, but was also cautious of any excesses of femininity that could undermine her authoritative charisma. This is in line with her hybrid expression of gender performativity.

"Indira Gandhi," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed March 14, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Indira-Gandhi.

2.4 Indira Gandhi' Leadership Style

Under the leadership of Gandhi's father, Jawaharlal Nehru (who governed from 1947 to 1964) and served as India's first prime minister after decolonization from Great Britain, the country was deeply influenced by the philosophy of India's most influential spiritual leader, Mahatma Gandhi. This ideology came to be known as "Gandhism." In her 1957 article, written in honor of her father, Indira Gandhi explicitly embraced this philosophy, particularly its spirit of open-mindedness, which fosters growth, development, and the breaking of entrenched patterns. She reflected on the dynamic nature of Gandhism during Gandhi's lifetime, stating: "While

Gandhi was with us, Gandhism, like all great religions in the lifetime of their founders, possessed a dynamic quality. It was alive, evolving, and ever-growing. There was no rigid path to follow, no fixed doctrine to interpret."[83] In the framework of transactional versus transformational leadership, these are the first signs of Gandhi's inclination toward the transformational, driven by the belief that change is the key to progress.

In addition to Gandhi's philosophical kinship with Mahatma Gandhi, the strong emphasis placed on national unity in Indian society in Indira's rhetoric is also in line with transformative leadership as theorized by Bass. Gandhi tried to create unity in various ways in order to bring about large-scale reforms (this will be discussed in more detail in the next paragraph). Collective identification is, within the concept of transformative leadership in the political backdrop, a tool for pushing through a modernization agenda. One of Gandhi's ways of shaping this unity is by isolating Indian unity in the relationship it has with other countries: "We must have unity. It is because of its lack we fell prey to foreign power."[84] Transformational leadership requires a shared national narrative, and Gandhi constructs this through symbolic rhetoric. This method of fostering a sense of unity may be a consequence of India's colonial past, as the nation once "fell prey" to foreign rule. By invoking this collective memory, Gandhi strengthens national cohesion, enabling the realization and justification of sweeping reforms.

"The capitalist system says it want to eradicate poverty, and the communist system also says that it want to eradicate poverty. But we have not adopted any of these systems because we find that they have not worked in their own country, and they have had to pay a tremendous price. That is why we chose another way."[85] This quote, from a speech Gandhi delivered to the All-India Congress Committee in 1969 (three years into her tenure as Prime Minister of India), illustrates the scale of her reforms. It highlights her break from previous economic systems and her ambition to chart an entirely new, alternative course. The most significant changes took place in the economic sphere, but far-reaching measures, such as family planning, were also introduced. This highlights the profound level of transformation, or at least the intent behind it in Gandhi's political vision, so substantial that it permeated deep social structures, ultimately influencing the individual freedoms of citizens within Indian

[83] Indira Gadhi, "My Reminiscences of "Bapu," in *India: Speeches and Reminiscences* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 24.
[84] Indira Gandhi, "Address at Madras University," in *India: Speeches and Reminiscences* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 55.
[85] Indira Gandhi, "The Role of the Congress Party," in *India: Speeches and Reminiscences* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 98.

society.

However, analysis of the primary source material shows that transformative leadership, which characterizes the core of Gandhi's political style, does not exclude the possibility of influences that are in line with a transactional framework. In a speech from 1967, Gandhi had this to say about traditional values: “But I don’t think I am against traditions as such. I believe that our ancient tradition, our ancient philosophy, has much in it that is timeless, that is of the same value today as it was thousands of years ago and will be perhaps a thousand years hence. These timeless values and ideas we must stick to. They are our roots. They are our strength. But over the centuries, over the years, if you don’t keep cleaning any place it gathers dust and cobwebs.”[86] The quote makes it clear that, despite the large-scale reforms that Gandhi announced in speeches, articles and interviews in the first years of her premiership, in certain areas there is a conservative attitude towards political beliefs. This could be seen as a strategy to use transactional elements to ensure stability and build a strong foundation of legitimacy among Gandhi’s conservative base. By incorporating these nuances, Gandhi garnered broad support across the political spectrum during her tenure, while still managing to advance a transformative agenda. The statement "No political party exists merely in itself…"[87] from a speech on the role of the Congress Party, delivered to the All-India Congress Committee in 1969, emphasizes that a party is more than a bureaucratic structure; it is a dynamic network shaped by political authority and ideology. For Gandhi, party loyalty was not just tradition but a strategic tool of power. She centralized authority, emphasized discipline and hierarchy, and leveraged loyalty networks to both strengthen her position and implement political reforms. This illustrates that transactional leadership not only ensures stability but can also serve as a mechanism for structural change.

2.5 The Interplay between Gender Performativity and Indira Gandhi’s Leadership Style

Indira Gandhi’s political leadership style is characterized by an apparent paradox: on the one hand, she implemented transformational reforms that profoundly reshaped Indian society; on the other, her gender performativity remained deeply rooted in conservative and traditional norms. Her political authority and gender performativity were in constant interplay, with traditional gender roles at times serving as a strategic tool to advance her transformative

[86] Gandhi, “Address at Madras University,” 58.
[87] Gandhi, “The Role of the Congress Party,” 100.

agenda. This resulted in a hybrid governance model, intertwining both transformational and transactional elements.

Her reforms aimed at fundamental social and political change, and she mobilized the population around a shared vision of modernization and progress. Her rhetoric emphasized collective responsibility and national unity, as reflected in her statement: “We must have unity. It is because of its lack we fell prey to foreign power.” Through this, she constructed a national identity that served as a driving force for large-scale reforms. Notably, however, this transformative approach did not extend to her gender performativity. Rather than challenging traditional female roles, she embodied the archetype of the motherly leader, legitimizing her authority as a political figure by aligning with maternal characteristics that were considered desirable within the Indian gender norms of leadership. This was evident in her choice of clothing, wearing traditional Indian women's attire such as the sari, the explicit way in which she distanced herself from feminism as an ideological movement, and her emphasis on care and service as political virtues, all of which reinforced this image. This gave rise to a striking contradiction: while profoundly transforming Indian society, she simultaneously reaffirmed traditional expectations of female authority. However, this strategy served a political function. By embracing conservative gender roles, Gandhi reinforced her position within a patriarchal political arena. Here, gender performativity was not merely a form of personal expression but functioned as a transactional exchange mechanism, in which she accepted traditional norms in return for political acceptance. This demonstrates that her style of governance was not purely transformational but also incorporated transactional elements to ensure legitimacy and stability.

Although Gandhi legitimized her leadership through traditional female archetypes, this performativity at times clashed with her policy choices. This is particularly evident in her radical family planning policies, where she regarded birth control as essential to India’s development. Her emphasis on regulating population growth appears to contradict the ideal of motherhood that she strongly promoted in her rhetoric elsewhere. This tension illustrates that gender performativity in the context of Indira Gandhi was not static but shaped by the expectations of political leadership and the influence of gender norms. While she positioned herself as a caring, maternal leader, she simultaneously implemented policies that seemingly undermined the traditional image of motherhood. This highlights how Gandhi navigated prevailing gender norms, strategically balancing conformity and reinterpretation to advance her political agenda. In this dynamic, this illustrates clearly that gender performativity and approach to ruling are not separate entities but continuously interact and shape one another.

Although Gandhi's gender performativity is often regarded as conservative, it can paradoxically also be seen as a form of transformation. Rather than adopting overtly feminist rhetoric, she used traditional gender roles as a vehicle to establish her exercise of power and increase the acceptance of women in politics. This resulted in a subtler yet effective approach to normalizing the presence of women in positions of power. Her ability to leverage traditional gender norms while simultaneously implementing structural reforms demonstrates that transformational leadership does not always require an explicit break with the past. By emphasizing maternal care and national responsibility, Gandhi reshaped perceptions of female leadership and carved out a unique position for herself within the Indian political landscape.

2.6 Conclusion

Gandhi's leadership and gender performativity were not separate elements but rather structures that continuously interacted with one another. Her transformational policies were facilitated by transactional gender performativity, while certain policy decisions created tensions within her performed female identity. This resulted in a hybrid form of governance in which transformation and preservation, performativity and power, strategy and ideology were constantly negotiated. This dynamic illustrates that Gandhi's political strategy cannot be neatly categorized as either purely transactional or transformational. While her policies were transformational, her gender performativity operated in part as a transactional tool. At the same time, this very performativity functioned as a subtle form of transformation by reshaping perceptions of female leadership in India.

In answering the sub-question this chapter has demonstrated that gender performativity was an integral part of Gandhi's leadership strategy. Rather than being a static or secondary characteristic, it was a dynamic mechanism that both reinforced and challenged existing power structures. Through the analysis of her rhetoric and leadership decisions, it becomes evident that her performativity was neither purely strategic nor entirely ideological, but rather a complex interplay that shaped and legitimized her political authority. In this sense, her approach to ruling was not merely a paradox but a nuanced negotiation of gender and power that contributed to her sustained influence in Indian politics.

Chapter 3
Case Study Margaret Thatcher

3.1 Introduction

In chapter three of this thesis, the case study on gender performativity in Margaret Thatcher's political leadership is explored through an in-depth analysis of selected primary sources. The analytical structure is guided by the same two theoretical lenses introduced earlier: gender performativity (as theorized by Judith Butler) and the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership styles (as theorized by Bernard M. Bass). Throughout the chapter, connections are drawn between both frameworks in order to provide a layered interpretation of Thatcher's public persona and rhetorical strategies. This approach aims to offer a fresh perspective on her premiership, expanding upon existing scholarship with new insights derived from primary material. In line with the methodological approach discussed in chapter one, all source material has been examined through Critical Discourse Analysis. The chapter opens with a brief contextual discussion, including relevant historiography and political background, to situate Thatcher's exercise of power within its specific cultural and temporal setting. Additionally, the academic relevance of the case is addressed, highlighting its contribution to existing debates on gender and political governance in the context of Thatcher and the United Kingdom. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of key findings, offering a grounded and theoretically informed answer to the sub-question.

3.2 Summary of Historiography and Academic Relevance

Academic research on gender performativity in the context of Margaret Thatcher has consistently examined how she operated within a male-dominated political environment by adopting traits culturally associated with masculinity. Scholars such as Ribberink (2005)[88], Williams (2024)[89], and Cartagena (2023)[90] agree that Thatcher established political legitimacy by displaying characteristics like decisiveness, resilience, and toughness, while simultaneously maintaining elements of traditional femininity in her appearance and vocal

[88] Ribberink, "I Don't Think of Myself as the First Woman Prime Minister: Gender, Identity and Image in Margaret Thatcher's Career".
[89] Williams, "The Unsettling of Women Prime Ministers".
[90] Cartagena, "Gender Self-Representation in the Discourse of Margaret Thatcher Before, During and After Her Role as the First Female Prime Minister in the UK."

presentation. These analyses, however, differ in their interpretations of whether her gender performance was a strategic political maneuver or a constrained reaction to prevailing gender norms, thereby reflecting the broader scholarly tension between structural determinism and individual agency. More broadly, British academic literature on gender and political leadership highlights enduring institutional and discursive exclusions. Writers like Skeggs (1997)[91], Gill (2007)[92], and Beard (2017)[93] emphasize that women in politics are structurally cast as outsiders, compelled to adopt male-coded behaviors to gain credibility. Research on political institutions (Hoskyns 1996; Kenny 2007)[94], media framing (Childs & Campbell 2014)[95], and linguistic expectations (Cameron 1995)[96] further underlines how the ideal of leadership remains heavily masculinized, resulting in the marginalization of feminine-coded political styles.

This thesis addresses a distinct gap in the literature by bringing together Butler's theory of gender performativity and Bass's model of transactional and transformational leadership. While existing studies have acknowledged the masculinized dimensions of Thatcher's authority, few have considered how these gendered expressions intersect with the intent and style of her governance. Through a dual analysis of gender and leadership discourse, this research proposes a more nuanced interpretation of performativity, not merely as a question of image or language, but as a structural component of political power. In doing so, it sheds light on the ways gendered norms both constrain and enable political leadership in the British context.

3.3 Gender Performativity and Margaret Thatcher

A general observation that can be made about the way gender is brought to life in the social reality surrounding Thatcher is that her womanhood is consistently measured in relation to culturally constructed ideals of masculinity and the expectations traditionally associated with male gender roles in many Western societies. This claim will be examined in greater depth later in the chapter, but what stands out in Thatcher's rhetoric is that this performative attitude

[91] Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*.
[92] Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture".
[93] Beard, *Women & Power*.
[94] Hoskyns, *Integrating Gender*; Kenny, "Gender, Institutions, and Power"
[95] Childs and Campbell, "Feminising Politics?"
[96] Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene*

began to take shape in her younger years, rooted in the way she and her sister, Muriel Roberts, were raised. In Thatcher's childhood and teenage years, her father was her great role model, as she says in her well-known St. Francis Prayer in 1979: "I just owe almost everything to my father."[97] Her father functioned as a formative gender role model and played a significant part in shaping the foundations of Thatcher's gender performativity. In an interview on the British television program from 1985, Thatcher reflected on her upbringing, noting that qualities traditionally associated with masculinity were strongly emphasized and subsequently internalized from an early age. These included learning to debate and articulate political opinions, a deep sense of duty, and strong feelings of patriotism, traits she described succinctly by recalling, "We were taught to argue, and so we did!"[98] Thatcher also speaks of her mother with great admiration, albeit in a manner that aligns with the traditional division of roles between men and women within family life: "My mother was marvelous, but my mommy didn't get involved in the argument, no, she'll get supper ready."[99] The paradoxical nature of Thatcher's stance on gender roles, reflected in the way she simultaneously affirms the legitimacy of traditional divisions while resisting alignment with them in her personal circumstances, can be traced back to her youth and would go on to shape the tone and direction of her political messaging throughout her career.

Her gender performativity during this period had a strategic character, as Thatcher employed her gender in a deliberate and calculated manner to position herself within a predominantly male leadership sphere and thereby gain political legitimacy. In this, she strikes a balance by placing as little emphasis as possible on her womanhood, conveying above all the message that she just happens to be a woman, but that this has no bearing on her performance as a political figure and, later, as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. In her rhetoric, Thatcher employed various techniques to downplay the influence of her gender. For example, she frequently responded to questions with a sexist undertone through humor and irony, thereby disarming their impact. A clear instance of this can be seen during a press conference following her victory in the Conservative Party leadership contest in 1975, when she was explicitly asked whether she expected to face challenges related to her gender in the

[97] Margaret Thatcher, *Remarks on Becoming Prime Minister (St Francis's Prayer)*, May 4, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103346.
[98] Margaret Thatcher, interview by Miriam Stoppard, *Woman to Woman*, Yorkshire Television, broadcast November 19, 1985, recorded October 2, 1985, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gMyDMHU9tI.
[99] Thatcher, *Woman to Woman*.

public sphere: “Give me a chance!...They seem to like ladies!”[100] However, Thatcher's gender performativity combines “masculine” toughness with strategically deployed emotion and vulnerability, ensuring a degree of femininity and, by extension, her humanity. In the interview with Miriam Stoppard, Thatcher even openly displays emotion and tears, revealing a level of vulnerability rarely seen during her time as Prime Minister. She also reflects on how she copes with the intense criticism directed at her policies and personality by the British public: “You don’t grow second skin, although it looks like some politicians have.”[101] She presents herself as human, yet maintains control. This illustrates how gender performativity is fluid and can be employed contextually. The contrast with her Iron Lady image highlights her ability to adjust her performativity depending on the circumstances at hand.

According to Butler’s theory, the meaning of gender emerges within discourse, particularly at moments when a rupture occurs between language and expectation. When the two are seamlessly aligned, the performativity of gender goes unnoticed. It is precisely through this rupture that what is normally taken for granted becomes visible and open to reflection. An illustrative example of this is one of Thatcher’s most famous statements: “The lady’s not for turning”, delivered during a speech at the Conservative Party Conference in 1980. In using the word “lady”, Thatcher positions herself squarely within a feminine framework, only to immediately subvert it by asserting a radical intransigence. This is the performative paradox that produces a rupture between expectation and language: she emphasizes her womanhood, yet conducts herself in the manner typically associated with male leadership. Thatcher’s rhetoric thus constructs a new form of female authority, one that may be understood as hard, rational and direct.

Thatcher’s deliberate disassociation from feminist discourse provides a further illustration of the strategic nature of her gender performativity. In public statements, she repeatedly distanced herself from the feminist movement, famously declaring at the Conservative Women’s Conference in 1988, “With feminists like that, who needs male chauvinists?” By ridiculing feminism in this way, Thatcher was able to reassure her conservative base while simultaneously reinforcing her image as a leader who valued personal merit and self-reliance over collective identity politics. However, this rhetorical distancing did not prevent her from implementing policies that contributed to greater economic autonomy for women. Measures such as deregulation and tax reform allowed more women to enter the

[100] Margaret Thatcher, *Press Conference after Winning Conservative Leadership* (February 11, 1975), Margaret Thatcher Foundation, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102487.
[101] Thatcher, *Woman to Woman*.

workforce and participate in entrepreneurial activity. This tension between performance and substance illustrates how gender performativity, as Butler argues, often operates independently of the political content it appears to express. By presenting herself as opposed to feminist ideals while advancing outcomes aligned with certain feminist goals, Thatcher created a form of governance that was both ideologically palatable to her audience and pragmatically empowering for many women. This paradox highlights the flexibility of gendered rhetoric in the political sphere, where symbolic gestures often carry more immediate weight than their underlying ideological substance. Thatcher's case reveals how political actors can disarm opposition and gain legitimacy by selectively rejecting the labels associated with certain movements, while simultaneously incorporating aspects of their agendas into actionable policy.

Thatcher's signature style included tailored suits with broad shoulders, pearl necklaces, and her iconic handbag. These elements were not merely fashion choices; they served as deliberate tools of political expression. Her handbag, for instance, became emblematic of her political style, to the extent that the verb "to handbag" emerged to describe her assertive approach in cabinet meetings. Notably, Thatcher also underwent vocal training to lower her voice, lending it a more commanding and authoritative tone during parliamentary debates. Yet, she consciously maintained her femininity through dress, distinguishing herself from her male colleagues while reinforcing her unique role in British politics. This deliberate fusion of femininity and strength illustrates how Thatcher used gender performativity to legitimize and solidify her authority within a patriarchal political structure.

John Redman, Margaret Thatcher at No. 10 Downing Street, photograph, in "How Margaret Thatcher Turned Her Handbag Into A Weapon," by Victoria Moss, British Vogue, November 27, 2020, accessed May 2, 2025, https://www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/article/margaret-t

3.4 Margaret Thatcher's Leadership Style

Margaret Thatcher's manner of rule exhibits several traits that align with both the transactional and transformational forms as defined by Bernard M. Bass. However, the most prominent elements in her rhetoric fall within the framework of transactional leadership. A striking feature of Thatcher's speeches and interviews is the way she positions herself as a pragmatic leader who restores and maintains order and discipline through concrete measures and straightforward language. This becomes clear from a speech to the Conservative Party Conference in 1984: "We have been resolute on the rule of law, on the maintenance of order. We must be. And we shall be. Because without an ordered and disciplined society there is no freedom for any of us."[102] Thatcher repeatedly cites concrete and policy-related examples in her statements to demonstrate the maintenance of public order. In doing so, she seeks to use measurable achievements and policy control to gain the trust of the public and her political base. This clearly aligns with Bass's theory, which, within the framework of transactional leadership, identifies a causal relationship between compliance and reward: adherence to the law ensures the preservation of order, with implications such as security and economic stability.

The transactional nature of Thatcher's tenure and her tendency to preserve the status quo are also reflected in her role as leader of the Conservative Party and in the conservative ideology regarding existing social structures. In her public statements, Thatcher repeatedly emphasizes the importance of established institutions such as the family and the accompanying traditional gender roles. She links these two by asserting that the nation-state derives its foundation and strength from these traditional familial structures: "The structure of that nation is a family structure. No, it still is, you know, in spite of everything." Thatcher reinforces the strength of the traditional family by asserting that it still forms the foundation of the nation "in spite of everything." This reflects a distinctly transactional style of leadership, in which stability and the reinforcement of social norms are central. It implies that intervention in these structures is unnecessary unless the existing order is under threat. The logic of reward embedded in transactional leadership is also evident in her valorization of traditional virtues within the family, such as duty and discipline, while rejecting deviations from this model (such as feminism) as disruptive to the established order on which much of society is perceived to rest.

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[102] Margaret Thatcher, *Speech to Conservative Party Conference* (Brighton, October 12, 1984), Margaret Thatcher Foundation, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104905.

However, Margaret Thatcher's leadership style also undeniably exhibits characteristics that align with transformational leadership. This is most clearly observed in the way she sought to inspire and mobilize the British people toward a sense of collective identity and purpose. Central to Thatcher's vision were values such as freedom, particularly in the context of the neoliberal economic policies for which she became widely known, patriotism, and individual responsibility. These ideals were not merely policy positions but were framed as essential components of what it meant to be British in a time of national and global change. In order to tie this vision to a shared British identity, Thatcher employed a range of rhetorical strategies, including the use of historical references, emotionally charged language, and appeals to national pride and resilience. Through such techniques she positioned herself as both a political leader and a symbolic figurehead for a renewed, revitalized Britain. Firstly, Thatcher mobilizes British society by fostering awareness that every individual contributes to the nation's recovery through a shared sense of responsibility, one that involves not merely economic revival but a renewal of collective spirit ("There are many things to be done to set this nation on the road to recovery, and I do not mean economic recovery alone, but a new independence of spirit and zest for achievement"[103]). This approach carries a distinctly transformational quality, as it moves beyond changes in political or economic structures and begins to permeate the very being and identity of the people themselves.

Thatcher's style of governance was marked not only by practical policy-making but also by her ability to tell a bigger story about Britain's future. In her speeches, she often combined clear political messages with strong, emotionally charged language that appealed to national pride and a sense of history. She spoke of Britain not just as a country in need of economic reform, but as a proud nation that had to be protected and renewed. "We in the Conservative Party believe that Britain is still great"[104], she said, encouraging people to take responsibility for restoring that greatness. Through statements like this, Thatcher presented herself as a political leader and a symbol of national revival

Even when she spoke about specific policy goals, such as reducing government control or protecting national sovereignty, Thatcher connected these issues to something much larger. In her Bruges speech, she argued, "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers

[103] Margaret Thatcher, *Speech to Conservative Party Conference ("The Reason Why")* (Brighton, October 10, 1980), Margaret Thatcher Foundation).
[104] Margaret Thatcher, *Speech to Conservative Party Conference* (Brighton, January 19, 1976), Margaret Thatcher Foundation, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102939.

of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level"[105]. With this statement, she did more than just criticize a policy development. She placed it within a wider vision of national independence and self-reliance. In doing so, she turned a concrete political concern into a symbolic expression of Britain's identity and role in the world. This shows how Thatcher effectively combined transactional and transformational leadership in her rhetoric. On the one hand, she focused on measurable political results and government efficiency. On the other, she appealed to collective ideals and long-term national purpose. By linking detailed policy reforms to emotionally charged themes such as freedom, sovereignty, and national pride, Thatcher built a bridge between the practical and the visionary. This approach helped her to present her exercise of power as both result-driven and deeply rooted in values that resonated with the British public.

3.5 The Interplay between Gender Performativity and Margaret Thatcher's Leadership Style

Linking Butler's and Bass's theories in the historical backdrop of Margaret Thatcher as a female political figure in the United Kingdom reveals valuable insights into both theories as analytical tools. Based on the analysis of primary sources, it can generally be argued that the two theories influence each other in both directions: gender performativity functions as a precondition for Thatcher's acquisition of leadership legitimacy, while at the same time the demands of governance, both transactional and transformational, act as a catalyst for her performativity. This can first be observed in the way Thatcher aligns herself with masculine norms of leadership in order to secure the support and conviction of her (Conservative) constituency. This form of performativity as a precondition for political legitimacy is, of course, not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, it primarily reflects Thatcher's own perspective and conviction, which are themselves shaped by the United Kingdom of that particular historical period and the prevailing views on gender roles and leadership positions. Thatcher did not present her womanhood as central to her political identity. Instead, she made it strategically invisible or subordinate to the norms of political authority shaped by male predecessors. By consistently framing herself as a leader who happened to be a woman rather

[105] Margaret Thatcher, *Speech to the College of Europe ("The Bruges Speech")* (Bruges, September 20, 1988), Margaret Thatcher Foundation, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332.

than emphasizing the fact that she was a woman in politics, she aligned herself with traditional expectations of authority. This calculated minimization of gender allowed her to function within a political environment that typically excluded women, without directly confronting the gendered structures that sustained it.

Transformational moments in Thatcher's leadership, such as those in which she articulated a national vision or called for collective responsibility, often required a strategic use of emotional appeal, symbolic language, or gestures of vulnerability. These elements helped her connect with the public on a deeper level and allowed her to frame political change as a shared moral project rather than a purely technocratic process. In such moments, her performance occasionally included traits traditionally associated with femininity, such as empathy, care, or emotional openness, making her message more personal and relatable.

In contrast, transactional moments focused on enforcing discipline, managing the economy, or restoring order often demanded that Thatcher embody a form of governance associated with rationality, control, and assertiveness. In these contexts, she performed decisiveness and authority while deliberately withholding emotion in order to project strength and competence. This style of leadership aligned with the expectations typically placed on male political figures and helped her reinforce her credibility in a political system where emotional expression could be seen as a weakness.

The shift between these two modes was not accidental but reflected the different expectations placed on her as a leader and as a woman. Thatcher adapted her gender performance according to the function and sociopolitical environment of her tenure. Her ability to alternate between forms of expression associated with traditional masculinity and femininity shows that her gender performativity was responsive rather than fixed. It also illustrates how leadership style and gender expression worked together to shape both her image and her political effectiveness. Thatcher's governance was shaped not in spite of these tensions but through them. Her ability to shift between roles, at times vulnerable and at other times resolute, allowed her to embody both strength and relatability depending on the setting. She rejected feminism as a political ideology, yet she became the first woman to occupy the highest political office in Britain, setting a powerful precedent for female authority. She praised the traditional roles of women as mothers and homemakers, yet she herself embodied a political identity that radically departed from those roles. These apparent contradictions are not inconsistencies but structural features of her political persona. Rather than undermining her authority, they contributed to its complexity and flexibility.

By inhabiting both traditional and transgressive forms of gender expression, Thatcher constructed a leadership identity that could respond to the competing demands of her time. Her authority did not rest on the consistent performance of one stable gendered identity, but on her ability to shift between modes in response to context. This shows that performativity and leadership are not separate or sequential but interact continuously. Thatcher's case makes visible how contradictions can become assets, allowing a political figure to move strategically within the constraints of gendered expectations while simultaneously redefining them.

3.6 Conclusion

Thatcher's leadership and gender performativity were not independent dimensions but interrelated structures that shaped one another throughout her political career. Her ability to alternate between toughness and emotionality, control and vision, rationality and vulnerability allowed her to navigate and ultimately transform the space of British political authority. Rather than being a neutral figure who simply happened to be a woman, Thatcher strategically performed gender in ways that both aligned with and disrupted dominant leadership norms. Her performativity was not static but situational driven, shifting in accordance with the expectations tied to different leadership functions and public roles.

In answering the sub-question, in what ways did gender performativity shape Margaret Thatcher's governance style and public rhetoric, as reflected in speeches, interviews, and media portrayals, this chapter has shown that gender performativity served as a precondition for her political legitimacy while also being reshaped by the demands of her political authority. Transactional elements in her rhetoric, such as discipline and order, were reinforced by a performative alignment with masculine authority. At the same time, transformational appeals to national pride, responsibility, and identity required emotional resonance and symbolic power, sometimes invoking feminine coded expressions. These overlapping strategies produced a hybrid leadership model that blurred the line between adaptation and disruption. Thatcher's performative contradictions, such as rejecting feminism while advancing women's autonomy or defending tradition while embodying change, were not weaknesses but structural features of her political identity. Her case illustrates that gender performativity and manner of rule are mutually constitutive forces, and that effective political authority often emerges not through consistency but through the strategic negotiation of paradox.

Chapter 4
Comparative Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The final analytical chapter of this thesis compares the two case studies on Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi in relation to gender performativity (Butler) and (political) leadership style (Bass), using rhetorical primary source material. This comparison is conducted through the Comparative Case Study (CCS) approach as outlined by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), which allows for a nuanced, context-sensitive exploration of complex political identities and leadership performances. The comparative analysis is structured into three distinct sections: the horizontal comparison, the vertical comparison, and, finally, the transversal comparison. Each subsection will begin with a brief discussion of the construction of the comparison in order to maintain clarity in the analytical structure. In addition, each section specifies the sub-question it addresses.

4.2 Horizontal comparison

The horizontal comparison, as conceptualized by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), examines two distinct phenomena within the same time frame, but situated in different social (in this case, socio-national) contexts. In this study, the horizontal comparison is conducted between the two case studies of Gandhi and Thatcher, through the dual analytical lens of gender performativity and transactional/transformational leadership theory. The horizontal layer is structured around the two central subthemes: gender performativity and style of governance. This method reveals how performative female leadership emerges, adapts, and is strategically mobilized within differing patriarchal governmental systems. By examining both leaders side by side, the analysis highlights context-specific adaptations as well as cross-case parallels in the exercise and legitimization of political authority.

The gender performativity of both political figures reveals similarities and differences that span from surface-level expressions, such as appearance, to the ideological positioning evident in their rhetoric. In terms of the former, both Thatcher and Gandhi employed their physical and visual presentation as ideological tools. Aiming to foster broad appeal across both progressive and conservative segments of British and Indian society, each leader adhered to traditional gender expectations rooted in her respective cultural backdrops. Thatcher was

known for her tailored suits, feminine accessories, and her iconic handbag, which came to symbolize her distinctive manner of rule. Gandhi, by contrast, typically wore traditional attire such as the sari and adopted a restrained, modest appearance, complemented by maternal gestures aligned with Indian archetypes of female political authority as nurturing "mother" figures. By maintaining these familiar visual codes, both women avoided alienating their constituencies and sidestepped the potential dissonance that might have arisen from more unconventional or transgressive forms of self-presentation. This strategy of aligning with cultural tradition and conservatism also manifests ideologically, as both political leaders seek to avoid losing political support and legitimacy. This dynamic is evident in their relationships to feminism, albeit in different ways. Thatcher is the most explicit in her rhetoric, expressing clear disapproval of the Second Wave of Feminism and emphasizing individual merit over collective gender advocacy as a collective struggle. Gandhi, by contrast, adopts a more nuanced stance: while she avoids association with certain feminist projects, she openly identifies with feminine values and acknowledges the unequal treatment of men and women. This paradoxical character is present in the rhetoric of both leaders. They distanced themselves from the ideology of gender equality movements, yet showed sympathy for several of the principles and goals championed by the Second Wave. Both leaders address the issue in ways that avoid any appearance of radicalism that might alienate their audience, even as they, to some extent, align themselves with the movement.

It could thus be argued that both women operate within traditional gender roles specific to the British and Indian social contexts, but rewrite these roles in ways that serve their political leadership. In a sense, Thatcher and Gandhi engage with gender archetypes such as motherhood and reshape them to align with the expectations of their respective societies. Thatcher, navigating a public arena dominated by masculine norms, embraces the image of the Iron Lady, reflecting a strategic awareness that this label grants her political legitimacy within British society. Gandhi, by contrast, identifies as the Mother of the Nation, as motherhood represents a desirable form of feminine energy in Indian leadership roles for women. In short, the way gender is expressed through the political personas of Gandhi and Thatcher (as Iron Lady and Mother of the Nation) serves a strategic governmental purpose. Beyond simply conforming to traditional gender norms, both Thatcher and Gandhi can be seen as actively intervening in prevailing expectations of womanhood. Rather than passively embodying societal ideals, their performances of gender strategically reconfigure public and institutional perceptions of female leadership. Gender performativity in this sociopolitical environment does not equate to mere adaptation; instead, it functions as a conscious and

executive charged engagement with cultural archetypes. Thatcher's Iron Lady persona simultaneously affirms and disrupts the male-dominated norms of British politics, while Gandhi's evocation of motherhood draws on revered cultural symbolism to legitimize her authority, even as it subtly redefines the scope of maternal exercise of power. In both cases, gender performance becomes a tool for negotiating power within patriarchal structures, expanding the range of acceptable leadership identities for women in their respective national settings.

Within the framework of Bass's theory of leadership styles, it can be argued that both Thatcher and Gandhi exhibit traits of both transformational and transactional leadership in their respective premierships. The transformational dimension of Indira Gandhi's authority is particularly evident in the way she integrates spiritual philosophies into her rhetoric. She repeatedly expresses admiration for Mahatma Gandhi and emphasizes that his ideas should serve as the foundation for policymaking within the Indian context. These convictions reflect a clear vision of the direction in which she believes the nation should move. This vision gains traction in the broader social framework through Gandhi's emphasis on unity. This focus aligns strongly with the principles of transformational leadership, in which political leaders seek to unite the people around a common purpose and guide them toward a shared future shaped by the leader's ideals. Primary source analysis reveals, however, that Gandhi employs transactional strategies such as her explicit association with Indian traditions as a means to advance a modern governmental agenda. In doing so, she positions herself in public discourse as a guardian and enforcer of moral values. This serves as a deliberate political strategy aimed at satisfying the dominant conservative beliefs within society, allowed her to navigate traditional expectations while pursuing progressive reforms. This stance also aligns with her identification as a maternal type of gendered public figure, as it allows her, in the role of "mother," to preserve moral order while simultaneously rewarding and punishing. This dynamic closely corresponds to the principles of transactional leadership theory.

Margaret Thatcher's style of governance can be understood as a combination of transformational and transactional strategies, though her emphasis on ideological clarity gave her leadership a particularly transformational dimension. She presented her political vision as a moral imperative, promoting economic liberalism as the only viable path forward. In doing so, she mobilized national sentiment around values such as self-discipline, independence, and economic resilience. These ideals were framed as essential to Britain's identity and future, and thus reflect the key characteristics of transformational leadership, in which the leader seeks to reshape collective goals and values. However, Thatcher also displayed a pronounced

transactional style, particularly in her economic policymaking and internal party governance. She enforced a structured leadership model based on loyalty, discipline, and merit. These transactional elements allowed her to implement controversial policies with a strong command over state-level processes.

A comparative analysis of Gandhi and Thatcher reveals that both leaders moved fluidly between transformational and transactional modes, depending on political demands and contextual pressures. Yet, the form and effect of these styles were deeply influenced by gendered expectations and cultural norms. Gandhi's transformational leadership drew heavily on spiritual and moral rhetoric, seeking unity through shared values rooted in tradition. Thatcher's transformation was based on ideological conviction and economic reform. Where Gandhi invoked the maternal archetype to legitimize authority through care and moral guidance, Thatcher leaned into a rational, firm, and managerial persona that aligned more closely with masculinized norms of political authority. In both cases, gender shaped not only the rhetorical performance of leadership, but also the conditions under which it was accepted. Their contrasting strategies illustrate that performative female leadership within patriarchal systems must constantly negotiate between social expectation and executive ambition.

The horizontal comparison makes visible that both Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi developed unique yet overlapping strategies of female governance through purposeful gender performance. Rather than setting gender aside, each leader mobilized culturally embedded norms to reinforce their political authority. Thatcher presented herself as a firm and rational figure, yet combined this with maternal symbolism to appeal to national identity. Gandhi drew on the image of the caring Mother of the Nation, using traditional femininity as a foundation for moral and political legitimacy. While their expressions of leadership differ, both reinterpreted gender roles to fit their respective ambitions within patriarchal contexts. Their tenures was not a passive reflection of societal norms but an active reworking of them. These gendered strategies adapted to political circumstances and public sentiment. Although parallels exist in their performative logic, the deeper structures shaping their rise and rule differ significantly. These underlying factors are the focus of the following vertical comparison

4.3 Vertical comparison

The vertical comparison, according to the methodology of Bartlett & Vavrus (2017), examines how phenomena at different levels influence one another. In this context, the levels are based

on scale, distinguishing between micro, meso, and macro levels. While the horizontal comparison focuses on analyzing simultaneous phenomena in different settings, the vertical comparison is concerned with power relations, institutional hierarchies, and levels of scale. The central idea in this form of comparison is that social and political phenomena (in this study, the concepts of gender performativity and leadership style) are not isolated from broader structures, but are shaped through interactions with systems operating at higher or lower levels. The micro level focuses on the individual, including personal beliefs (for example, shaped by upbringing), choices, and rhetorical strategies. The meso level zooms out and concerns national institutions, such as parliaments, political parties, the media, and the electoral system. The macro level addresses even more overarching (trans)national structures, such as colonial history or global economic trends. The vertical comparison and analysis are structured according to these three levels of scale, within which the case studies and their related theories are compared.

Whereas the horizontal comparison highlighted how Thatcher and Gandhi performed leadership within distinct cultural backdrops, the micro-level shifts the focus to how these performances took shape through personal histories and internalized frameworks. Though elements such as gender presentation and leadership style have already been explored, this level examines how these elements were contextually negotiated and deeply rooted in private experiences. In the case of Indira Gandhi, early reflections reveal a personal tension between national duty and feminine identity, already visible in childhood writings. This internal conflict between traditional expectations and a growing sense of political purpose shaped how she later balanced care, sacrifice and strength. Gandhi's adoption of the Mother of the Nation role was not simply a rhetorical strategy but aligned with personal values developed long before she entered office. Her early engagement with ideas of service and responsibility allowed her to perform maternal authority with credibility, while simultaneously enabling control and centralization of power. These tendencies, often seen as contradictory, coexisted within her from the beginning and created a hybrid style that could accommodate both softness and assertiveness.

Margaret Thatcher's personal background equally influenced her command performance. Raised in a strict and principled environment, she was deeply shaped by the worldview of her father, who instilled in her ideas of discipline, self-reliance and moral certainty. These convictions became the basis for a ruling approach focused on order and control, which she reinforced through deliberate presentation and rhetorical consistency. Her gender performance

was carefully constructed, not to challenge expectations, but to meet them on her own terms. In both cases, the foundations of gendered leadership were laid before either woman became a public figure. Their early experiences did not just shape their ideologies, but also influenced the way they navigated governance through gender. The micro level shows that performance is both strategic and public, and begins as an internal negotiation of identity, shaped over time and later projected outward with political effect

The comparative analysis at the meso level delves deeper into both political figures within the context of gender performativity and leadership as situated within the political parties to which Thatcher and Gandhi belonged. In the case of Gandhi, who operated as a governmental heir within the Congress Party's highly centralized structure, her rhetoric in primary sources emphasizes party discipline as a cornerstone of her premiership. In this sense, her party loyalty can be understood as a form of transactional strategy. Her gender performativity is, to a certain extent, aligned with the hierarchical political culture in which she operated, a system where female leadership remained an exception. Gandhi's ambivalent stance toward feminism is also closely tied to the conservative structure of her party. On the one hand, she speaks at conferences such as the All-India Women's Conference to address the importance of women's rights. On the other hand, she employs transactional strategies through conservative statements about feminism as a socio-political movement, thereby maintaining electoral legitimacy within her party. At the meso level, Thatcher and Gandhi show many similarities in terms of gender performativity and style of governance. Thatcher, like Gandhi, aligns her performativity and leadership approach with the conservatism of her party, explicitly rejecting feminist discourse. However, she does so in a different manner, undermining the notion of emancipation altogether, whereas Gandhi expresses a degree of sympathy for the underlying message that gender equality movements seeks to convey.

Finally, the macro level analysis explores broader ideological and historical forces. In the case of Indira Gandhi, her gender performativity and her approach to transactional and transformational leadership are closely connected to the postcolonial context and the nationalism that accompanies it. Her transformative rhetoric, which draws inspiration from spirituality such as her expressions of admiration for Mahatma Gandhi in speeches and opinion pieces and emphasis on moral independence, aligns with an anticolonial ideology. Through this, Gandhi fosters unity within society and projects a clear image of independence and self-reliance. Gender performativity becomes an extension of the nation, with Gandhi positioning herself as a maternal figure who embodies this postcolonial identity. Furthermore, Gandhi's rhetoric often includes transformative language about peace and independence,

projecting a stance of geopolitical neutrality. Within this framework, her gender performativity, characterized by maternal softness, helps reinforce this image of neutrality in the realm of international relations.

Thatcher's gender performativity and manner of governing were shaped on a macro level primarily by global currents such as neoliberalism and related economic ideologies. She responded to these developments through a transformational stance, using visionary rhetoric to articulate the direction in which the British state should move in relation to these broader forces. Additionally, Thatcher's rhetoric of national restoration evoked a sense of post-imperial nostalgia, framing Britain as a once-great nation in need of renewal. Her position as a female leader symbolized both modernity and continuity, aligning with ideals of moral authority and self-reliance. By performing strength, discipline and control, she reactivated traditional leadership codes in a new form. Thatcher actively used her gendered image to frame economic resilience as a national virtue, linking personal discipline to Britain's collective revival in the wake of industrial decline. From a comparative perspective, it can be argued that broader ideological systems both enabled and constrained the performativity and leadership of both political figures. In both cases, gender is not simply a personal choice or a way of communicating, but a meaningful point of connection between personal identity and broader geopolitical forces. In conclusion: this vertical comparison reveals how Thatcher and Gandhi's leadership was shaped across multiple layers of influence, from personal conviction to institutional dynamics and global ideological forces. Their gender performances were not isolated acts of self-presentation, but responses to the specific historical and structural contexts in which they operated. While their strategies differed, both leaders navigated patriarchal systems by aligning gender with authority in context-specific ways. Exercise of power and performativity thus emerged not from individual will alone, but from a continuous negotiation between identity, institutional expectations and the shifting demands of global governmental and economic frameworks.

4.4 Transversal comparison

In the final, transversal comparison, the focus lies on how ideas, practices, and structures evolve, recur, and transform across contexts in relation to the case studies of Gandhi and Thatcher. Within the methodology as outlined by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), it is considered essential that comparison in qualitative research is not limited to spatial (horizontal comparison) or hierarchical (vertical comparison) relationships alone. This form of

comparison is analytically more complex and abstract than the horizontal and the vertical, as it is not primarily grounded in location or scale, but rather in themes, processes, or discourses that move across and different settings.

As established in the previous two case studies and comparisons, the female leadership of both political figures can broadly be symbolized through two forms of cultural repertoires: Indira Gandhi as Mother of the Nation and Margaret Thatcher as the Iron Lady. The title Mother of the Nation, as reflected in Gandhi's rhetoric drawn from primary sources, is characterized by archetypal meaning, spiritually infused governance, appeals to sacrifice, and the creation of national unity through a message of moral guidance and collective care. The Iron Lady repertoire, likewise rooted in Thatcher's rhetoric from primary sources, aligns with the masculinization of political leadership, emphasizing the restoration of the British nation through pride and conservatism, as well as goal-oriented and rational neoliberal economic policy. These repertoires function as both symbolic representations and strategic tools through which both leaders navigated patriarchal expectations. They illustrate how gendered political identities were constructed through culturally resonant narratives of strength, duty, and national renewal.

The similarity between the two figures lies in the way both reshape existing gender roles, yet do so through distinct cultural registers. The cultural framework in which Gandhi operates is shaped by India's postcolonial nationalism, while Thatcher's performative style is grounded in Victorian conservatism. This distinction is traceable in the primary source analysis. Gandhi's speeches adopt a moral tone, invoking peace and national unity, often by framing India as distinct from the rest of the world or in contrast to the legacy of British colonial rule. Her emphasis on unity functions as a rhetorical tool to reinforce a sense of moral independence and postcolonial identity. Thatcher's rhetoric, by contrast, is articulated within a temporal context defined by an ethical economic framework centered on discipline and personal responsibility. The transversal comparison thus reveals how different forms of performative leadership, maternal authority in Gandhi's case and assertive female authority in Thatcher's, are activated within divergent historical and cultural fields. Yet these forms of gendered leadership share a recurring pattern. They both serve to legitimize female political authority through culturally embedded repertoires that simultaneously conform to and subtly transform dominant expectations of leadership.

The gender performativity and leadership style of Gandhi and Thatcher also adapts to different contexts of periods of crisis. An example of this is the war with Pakistan and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh in the case of Gandhi. Against this historical backdrop, her

widely discussed rhetoric of safeguarding national unity and upholding a narrative of Indian morality, grounded in spiritual principles, resurfaces with renewed force. Gandhi's performativity during this crisis emphasized her role as a protective and unifying maternal figure, reinforcing her symbolic position as Mother of the Nation. Thatcher, on the other hand, faced large-scale strikes and widespread unrest from trade unions. Her response was marked by rhetorical severity and a manner of rule rooted in discipline and resolve. Both leaders used moments of crisis as opportunities to redefine their performative identities. Gandhi embodied a nurturing figure of protection, while Thatcher positioned herself as the savior of national order. These examples demonstrate that female leadership and gender performativity take on new meanings when existing systems are destabilized. In both case studies, crisis moments function as critical junctures that challenge and reconfigure the limits of acceptable gendered leadership roles

Thatcher's Iron Lady persona and Gandhi's maternal symbolism continued to influence how later female politicians framed their authority, showing that their styles of governance resonated well beyond their time in office. The temporal dimension of this analysis extends the inquiry toward their enduring legacy and the ways in which their gendered performances continue to shape narratives of female authority beyond their time in office. The legacy of both leaders demonstrates that symbolic breakthroughs do not necessarily translate into structural change. Although Gandhi's maternal authority carried historical weight, it reinforced traditional gender roles rather than challenging them. Thatcher's ascent, though framed as a triumph of individual merit, reinforced a ideological vision that denied collective gendered struggle. In both cases, femininity was politically functional yet ideologically neutralized. These examples expose a core tension: performative leadership can succeed within patriarchal systems, but often by conforming to their terms. Rather than unsettling gendered power relations, it may repackage them in new forms. This reveals the fragile nature of legitimacy based on symbolic female leadership rather than structural gender equity.

In conclusion, both leaders reproduce and reformulate established repertoires of female authority, drawing on culturally embedded narratives to gain legitimacy within male-dominated governmental systems. In times of crisis, their gendered performances served to stabilize or reframe their political authority. What emerges is a complex paradox: while Thatcher and Gandhi expand the symbolic space available to women in leadership, they do so by distancing themselves from collective feminist projects. Yet their cases also reveal the

generative capacity of performativity to carve out new expressions of authority. Their political executive behavior operated within their immediate contexts and left behind discursive traces.

4.5 Conclusion

This comparative chapter has demonstrated how the political leadership of Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher was constructed through layered performances of gender and authority that were shaped by context, scale, and discourse. Through the horizontal comparison, it became clear how both leaders drew on culturally specific gender norms to assert legitimacy, while the vertical comparison highlighted the structural entanglements between personal identity, institutional expectations, and ideological frameworks. The transversal comparison further revealed how their leadership repertoires evolved across crises and temporalities, leaving behind lasting influence that extends beyond their political lifetimes. Although their strategies did not fundamentally challenge patriarchal systems, they show how performative female political authority can be both adaptive and generative. The comparative approach taken here provides insight into the dual nature of gender in governmental life: as a constraint shaped by tradition, and as a space for renegotiating executive power. Ultimately, Gandhi and Thatcher exemplify how governance is continuously negotiated through gendered meaning-making.

In addition, this chapter has shown that performativity is not a static not a fixed identity trait, but a responsive practice shaped by shifting state-level and cultural conditions. Both leaders mobilized gender not only to gain legitimacy, but also to stabilize or reframe their authority during times of transformation. While their rhetoric strategically avoided feminist identification, it nonetheless contributed to reshaping expectations of what female manner of rule could look like. Their cases remind us that symbolic breakthroughs matter, even when structural change remains incomplete.

Conclusion

In the conclusion of this thesis, concise summaries of the findings from the analytical chapters are presented to address the central research question: How does the application of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Bernard M. Bass's leadership style framework, through Critical Discourse Analysis and Comparative Case Studies of archival material from Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, uncover the influence of gender performativity on their leadership styles and their contextual differences? The conclusion demonstrates how each chapter systematically contributed to resolving different aspects of the research problem, with each providing a specific response to a sub-question that, taken together, form a comprehensive answer to the central inquiry. In addition to serving as a closing section with summaries, the conclusion also presents new insights that emerge when all findings are brought together. This conclusion introduces no new data but draws solely on the findings of the case studies and comparative analysis, but is solely based on the case studies and the comparative analysis derived from the primary source research.

The case study of Indira Gandhi, viewed through the lens of gender performativity and style of governance, reveals that her performativity was rooted in a traditional archetype of motherhood. Gandhi's rhetoric, demeanor, and outward appearance consistently revolved around her cultivated persona as the Mother of the Nation, embodying care, sacrifice, and moral authority. This maternal imagery not only reinforced her personal legitimacy but also established an emotional bond with the Indian populace. In a society where the familial structure was deeply embedded in cultural and political life, presenting herself as a symbolic mother enabled Gandhi to strengthen her authority within a patriarchal system. Gandhi adopted a nuanced position on feminism. Although she distanced herself from organized feminist movements, her governance nonetheless aligned with broader feminist objectives by promoting female visibility in public life. By presenting herself as an extension of traditional female roles rather than a challenger to them, Gandhi expanded the possibilities for women's participation in leadership without directly confronting entrenched gender hierarchies. This strategy enabled her to retain support from conservative constituencies while inspiring women to envision new roles beyond the private sphere.

Gandhi's approach to power can predominantly be described as transformational. This is particularly evident in her association with Mahatma Gandhi, India's most revered spiritual leader, whose legacy she invoked to legitimize her own political agenda. By framing her

authority within the moral tradition of Mahatma Gandhi, she portrayed her reforms as a continuation of the nationalist project and not a rupture with the past. This rhetorical strategy effectively rallied public support for her modernization programs, poverty alleviation efforts, and social reforms. Her primary rhetorical material also indicates that Gandhi sought to promote unity within a socially and religiously fragmented India. By fostering a collective national identity, she aimed to mobilize diverse groups behind a shared ideological vision. Her calls for unity often used moral and emotional language, invoking the metaphor of the family to encourage loyalty and obedience to the state. In doing so, Gandhi blended transformational rhetoric with cultural references deeply resonant in Indian society. Nonetheless, Gandhi's premiership also contained significant transactional elements. Her engagement with tradition and prevailing social norms was not incidental but purposeful. By affirming traditional values even as she pursued progressive reforms, she managed to appease conservative audiences and mitigate potential resistance. Publicly venerating Indian traditions and religious symbolism enabled her to appeal simultaneously to modernists and traditionalists, maintaining a broad political base. In this sense, Gandhi's leadership style reveals a sophisticated interplay between transformational and transactional strategies. She understood that lasting reform required balancing idealism with pragmatism. Through selective adaptation and careful rhetorical positioning, Gandhi was able to drive structural changes while maintaining a sense of cultural continuity.

The integration of both theoretical concepts, gender performativity and manner of ruling, provides a deeper understanding of the role of gender in Gandhi's executive authority. Traditional female performativity functioned as political capital for Gandhi. The image of the caring, maternal leader resonated with cultural expectations and gave her the authority to implement radical societal changes, such as economic reforms and nationalization, aligning with her transformative agenda. What at first appears to be a contradiction, using conservative gender roles to advance progressive policies, emerges upon closer examination as a deliberate symbiosis. Gandhi's performativity was not static, but evolved in response to shifting state-level circumstances. While she consistently promoted maternal ideals, she simultaneously implemented policies like radical family planning initiatives that could be perceived as conflicting with the idealized image of motherhood. This tension underscores the fluid interaction between gender norms and executive practices in her career. Gandhi's ability to blend conformity with reinterpretation illustrates that gender performativity and style of governance are not isolated dimensions but mutually constitutive forces, continuously shaping and reinforcing each other. By leveraging traditional archetypes while pursuing structural

transformation, Gandhi carved out a distinctive space for female leadership within a deeply patriarchal governmental context.

The case study of Margaret Thatcher offers a nuanced understanding of the interplay between gender performativity and leadership style within a distinctly patriarchal political environment. Drawing on rhetorical historical material, Thatcher's gender performativity can be described as predominantly masculinized, shaped by traits such as rationality, determination, and assertiveness. This performativity was encapsulated in the widely recognized persona of the Iron Lady, a symbolic construction that reinforced her authority while simultaneously resonating with existing societal expectations about exercise of power. This persona was more than emblematic; it was instrumental in navigating, but functioned as a key strategy through which Thatcher navigated the gendered constraints of British political life. Thatcher's public rejection of feminism further contributed to this strategic positioning. She distanced herself from feminist ideology and emphasized individual responsibility over collective emancipation. Nevertheless, many of her policies had emancipatory effects, particularly in the realm of economic participation and social mobility. This ambivalence reveals the complexity of her governmental identity, which did not rely on aligning with women's movements but instead forged an independent path that nonetheless expanded the possibilities for women in public life. Her approach reflected a broader refusal to define herself politically in gendered terms, thereby reinforcing her legitimacy within a male-dominated administrative structure. At the same time, Thatcher's performativity was not entirely devoid of traditionally feminine markers. Her visual presentation, especially in terms of dress and appearance, was carefully managed to maintain a layer of femininity that softened her otherwise hard-edged persona. This duality enabled her to assert strength and authority while avoiding the perception of being entirely disconnected from conventional norms of womanhood. In this sense, Thatcher's gender expression was neither fixed nor binary but was instead adapted to the function and context of her governance.

In relation to Bass's theory of leadership, Thatcher's governmental style can be primarily classified as transactional. Her emphasis on discipline, order, and the rule of law reflected a leadership model based on compliance and control. She advocated for the preservation of traditional institutions, such as the nuclear family, and positioned herself as a guarantor of stability in a time of social and economic upheaval. These features align with the transactional model, which emphasizes performance, reward, and adherence to established rules. However, Thatcher's approach to power was not limited to transactional dynamics. Her rhetoric and political agenda also carried distinct transformational elements. Particularly in

her calls for national unity and resilience in the face of globalization, Thatcher sought to reimagine British identity and reinvigorate a sense of purpose among the population. This transformational vision was often expressed through emotionally charged language and symbolic appeals to patriotism, responsibility, and self-reliance. In these moments, Thatcher moved beyond technocratic rule to embrace ideological leadership and entered the domain of ideological renewal. While maintaining her masculine-coded authority, she selectively employed themes associated with care and community, thereby enabling her to connect with citizens on a more emotional level. This fusion of transactional discipline with transformational inspiration allowed her to articulate a public vision that was both pragmatic and aspirational.

Thatcher's case therefore illustrates that gender performativity and leadership style do not operate in isolation but rather exist in a constant state of interaction. Her governance persona emerged from the careful negotiation between the expectations placed upon her as a woman and the demands of political authority. By shifting between masculine-coded traits and carefully maintained feminine symbolism, Thatcher constructed a flexible and effective governance identity. Her authority was not undermined by these shifts but instead reinforced by them, allowing her to function within a civic system that typically marginalized women while subtly challenging its gendered boundaries. This case exemplifies how performativity and manner of rule are mutually constitutive forces that together shape the possibilities and limits of female executive authority.

The comparative analysis reveals both key parallels and notable divergences in how Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher performed female leadership within their respective patriarchal political systems. Viewed through the combined lenses of gender performativity and style of leadership, both leaders employed traditional gender imagery to consolidate political legitimacy. Gandhi deliberately embraced the cultural archetype of the nurturing mother, while Thatcher cultivated a resolute and masculine public persona embodied in the figure of the Iron Lady. Despite these contrasting expressions, both performances were deeply rooted in prevailing national values, and both were used to anchor their authority within socially accepted gender roles. A key difference lies in how these symbolic repertoires were aligned with context-specific expectations of femininity and power. Gandhi's adoption of maternal imagery resonated with the Indian postcolonial context, where spiritual and familial symbolism held deep political meaning. Thatcher, by contrast, operated within a British tradition shaped by rationalism, self-reliance, and masculine-coded leadership norms. She performed gender in a way that allowed her to meet expectations of authority while subtly

incorporating markers of femininity through visual symbolism. In both cases, gender performativity did not simply conform to societal norms, but reinterpreted them to serve specific political goals.

Furthermore, both leaders moved fluidly between transactional and transformational leadership styles. Gandhi used transactional strategies to maintain legitimacy among conservative audiences, positioning herself as a moral guardian while promoting transformative reforms. Her approach to power relied on the metaphorical authority of motherhood to stabilize her political base, even as she pushed forward modernizing agendas. Thatcher, in turn, employed a transactional approach to enforce order and economic discipline, while her transformation-oriented rhetoric centered on revitalizing national identity in an era of decline. She fused pragmatic policymaking with an aspirational vision for Britain, thus blending compliance-based politics with ideological renewal. These findings highlight that both Gandhi and Thatcher purposefully combined gendered self-presentation with adaptive executive styles to navigate the expectations of their time and place. Their cases show that female governance within patriarchal systems often involves a continuous balancing act between tradition and transformation. Although their strategies were contextually distinct, both reveal how gender and leadership interact as mutually reinforcing tools in the exercise of governmental power. By reconfiguring familiar gender roles without directly challenging them, Gandhi and Thatcher expanded the boundaries of what female executive authority could look like within their respective national imaginaries.

Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that leadership performativity must be understood as a contextually embedded strategy through which political authority is both constructed and constrained. Rather than merely reflecting existing gender norms, performativity operates as a flexible tool, shaped by governance style and conditioned by national culture. In the cases of Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher, gender expression and executive power were never neutral or isolated dimensions, but interdependent and strategically intertwined. This interplay is not simply a theoretical observation but reveals how female leaders navigate systems historically structured to exclude them. Whether through Gandhi's maternal symbolism or Thatcher's masculinized command, gender performativity offered a pathway to authority within patriarchal institutions. At the same time, their differing approaches underscore that there is no universal script for female exercise of power. Instead, what emerges is a complex choreography in which conformity and disruption coexist. Manner of rule influenced how gender was performed, just as gendered expectations shaped the form and limits of executive leadership. By applying Butler's theory of performativity alongside Bass's leadership model,

this thesis provides a framework for understanding female governance as a dynamic negotiation of power, image, and societal expectation. It becomes clear that female authority is not granted through the rejection of norms, but through their careful recalibration within particular social and governmental settings. In doing so, Gandhi and Thatcher redefined what it means to lead as a woman, not by breaking the rules but by rewriting them from within. This insight has broader implications for the study of political exercise of power, suggesting that gender and power must always be analyzed in relation, not in isolation. Importantly, this thesis also responds directly to a well-documented gap in the literature, as outlined in the historiographical sections of Chapters Two and Three. While prior studies have examined the gendered performances of Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher, they have rarely connected these performances to the underlying structure and intent of their leadership styles.

By combining Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity with Bernard M. Bass's framework of transformational and transactional leadership, this study offers a novel, integrated analytical lens. By combining Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity with Bernard M. Bass's framework of transformational and transactional leadership, this study offers a novel, integrated analytical lens. This analytical synthesis directly contributes to feminist political theory, administration studies, and postcolonial historiography. It engages with core debates advanced by scholars such as Geraldine Forbes, Patricia Jeffrey, and Judith Butler herself, while also extending the scope of leadership models developed by Bass, Vroom and Yetton, and Fiedler. Furthermore, the study introduces a methodological contribution by applying Bartlett and Vavrus's Comparative Case Study approach to the study of executive leadership, complemented by Critical Discourse Analysis as theorized by Fairclough. This approach demonstrates that gender performance is not only a symbolic or rhetorical act but also fundamentally interwoven with governance practices. In doing so, the thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of how performative leadership operates within patriarchal institutions and expands the conceptual space for analyzing female governmental authority.

In doing so, the thesis not only responds to the historiographical gap identified in earlier chapters but also contributes directly to a central theoretical tension in the existing literature: whether female leaders strategically appropriate patriarchal norms to gain authority, or whether their premiership is primarily shaped and constrained by patriarchal structures. This tension is well recognized across feminist scholarship, and this study aligns itself with that debate by examining how Thatcher and Gandhi each navigated these constraints in highly different contexts. The thesis demonstrates that gendered leadership cannot be reduced to

either strategic agency or structural limitation, but must be understood as a continuous negotiation between both.

While this thesis has provided in-depth insights into the interplay between gender performativity and leadership style through the cases of Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, it is important to critically assess the scope and limitations of the research. This section reflects on those boundaries and outlines possible avenues for future study that could expand and deepen the analysis.

One limitation of this study lies in the nature of the primary source material, which is predominantly discursive. The research relies almost exclusively on verbal sources such as speeches, interviews, and written articles or opinion pieces. Although the thesis briefly addresses aspects of visual presentation, such as clothing and appearance, it does not include a systematic analysis of body language or non-verbal expression. Although rhetoric is central to gender performativity, this methodological focus may obscure other dimensions of performative leadership that are not captured through language. As a result, certain embodied practices remain outside the scope of the analysis. A second limitation concerns the focus on only two national contexts. By examining the United Kingdom and India, the thesis offers a meaningful comparative framework that highlights contrasts between Western and non-Western contexts, and between a former colonizing power and a formerly colonized state. However, generalizations beyond these two cases should be made with caution. Although the cultural, historical, and institutional differences are substantial, the findings have not been tested against wider global patterns. This means that the applicability of the conclusions outside of these specific settings remains open.

In response to these limitations, several directions for future research can be proposed. First, extending the analysis to more recent female leaders (such as Giorgia Meloni or Jacinda Ardern). A study of this kind could examine how gender performativity operates within the modern media environment and whether notable shifts can be traced across different historical periods. Second, future research would benefit from applying a more explicit intersectional perspective. Investigating how factors such as class, religion, ethnicity, or caste shape the performance and reception of executive authoriy would add valuable complexity to the analysis. Within this approach, attention should be given to female leaders from marginalized backgrounds, whose performances are subject to added constraints. Third, longitudinal research could examine how gender performativity evolves throughout a political career. This would offer deeper insight into how public personas evolve in response to social and political pressures.

By pursuing these directions, future research could refine both the theoretical framework and empirical understanding of gendered leadership and offer broader insights into the ways in which power, identity, and performance interact across diverse social and cultural contexts.

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